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["STOP!" SAID PHILIP. "STOP! WHAT MORE HAS TO BE SAID ON THIS SUBJECT, MUST BE SAID BEFORE ME!"]

KIT.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PHILIP DESMOND thought deeply and long over that speech of Constance Marlowe's. It was wonderful what power there seemed to be in it, and what a variety of small explanations was conveyed in it.

"Something on her mind! Something on her mind!"

The words ran in his head and danced before his eyes. "Something on her mind," on the mind of his wife, his child love, his beloved.

His own mind was tortured by the thoughts that came to it so quickly. At one moment a hot anger, a sudden, an unexpected jealousy flashed through it, then as sudden a tenderness.

He went into his smoking-room as soon as he was well arrived at Courtfield, and began pacing up and down slowly.

Constance might well congratulate herself on her first "coup," it had been subtle, but sure—it was a masterpiece. She had not imagined it would have so good an effect.

He thought and thought for a long time, and then he all at once lit a cigar, and as the fumes of his favourite weed floated about him, he grew soothed, and his thoughts became softer and pleasanter.

"What a fool I am, as if my little one could have anything to worry her. Why, she comes to me if she has a pin scratch, and must needs let me kiss the place to make it well. Trouble, worry. Bah! it is the fog and too many late hours."

He smoked on until his cigar was finished, and as he threw away the end, he felt considerably better.

"All the same, I shall see into this matter. Perhaps there is some small thing which is troubling the child, and she does not like to bring it to me. I must coax it out of her if I find this to be the case."

He popped his head into Kit's room as he went to dress for dinner.

"How does my little one like her new home, I wonder?" he asked in a light way.

Kit ran towards him like a child.

"Where have you been?" she asked, as he took her into his arms. "I wanted to make my first tour with you, Philip. Oh! I love Courtfield, what a dear old place; I feel like a queen here. Just fancy all this belonging to me. I don't think I shall care to live in London any more. This will be the most delightful home, although Chris says there must be a ghost, of course——"

"I'll ghost Master Chris when I see him."

Philip laughed.

She was so bright in this moment. All his thoughts and doubts floated away into thin air.

He held her back and looked at her carefully.

"And how is the headache, eh? Gone?"

"Quite gone," Kit answered with a smile.

She did indeed feel better. The fresh country air, cold as it was, with a touch of keen frost in it, had already invigorated her. The excitement and pleasure of entering her husband's old home where he had been born and had lived all his young days, drove away for a time the burden of her secret trouble.

She had flitted all over the house in com-

pany with Chris, and had won hearty admiration from the servants gathered together to welcome their master and mistress.

The fresh breezy atmosphere, the clear sky, the big house, seemed to give her courage and strength, and so it was that she threw off her lassitude and silence, and gladdened Philip's eyes by her return to her old self.

Even when he showed her a telegram from Maurice stating the hour he and Sybil would arrive, Kit did not relapse into her anxiety. Out of the chaos of her troubled thought, one idea had come—a determination.

She would speak frankly and openly to Maurice, she would show him the pain of the position he had so wrongly, so ungenerously forced upon her, and she would tell him straightforwardly that unless he undertook to forget the past and all that had happened—as she would try to do—she must put everything before Philip, and despite the sorrow that must be given him and Sybil, the whole truth would be told, and the matter settled finally and for ever.

Yes, the more she thought over this, the more determined she was to do it.

She would ask a duty of Maurice; moreover, she would suggest that for a time, until memory had healed the wound he had inflicted, that he should manage so that he did not come into her life so frequently, as he was now doing.

"I am sure there is good in him—yes, I am sure of it," the poor child thought to herself as she stood before her glass, and her maid put the finishing touches to her black dinner dress. "And when I put everything before him clearly I think he will be true to that good in him. He must know that there can be nothing but suffering for Sybil and for Philip if he continues to do as he is doing."

The comfort derived from this thought was in her face as she descended the wide staircase. A glorious vision of beauty in her black velvet-trailing skirts, with diamonds crowning her ruddy gold hair and gleaming from about her bodice.

Chris, who was standing in the hall, made a mock salaam as she approached.

"Hail Queen of the Zulus!" he cried, and then he slouched forward with his big awkward figure, and disclosed his tie hanging in two long strings.

"Please finish me off," he said.

Kit put down her fan and gloves, and standing on the lowest step of the stairs, performed her usual task of fastening his tie—Maurice came down the stairs at this very moment, Sybil and he had arrived while the rest were dressing for dinner.

"How good you are to your friends, Lady Desmond!" he said in a light, laughing fashion.

Kit coloured a little as she saw him, but she took great heart of grace from the change in his expression. It was the first time she had seen him without that heavy, moody look which had troubled Philip so much.

"Welcome to Courtfield, Captain Montgomery, she said, with the pretty assumption of dignity that yet sat shyly upon her. "I hope you are not very cold and that Sybil is not tired?"

"We are more than comfortable I assure you, Lady Desmond," then Maurice glanced at the tie, "allow me to congratulate you on your talent. I had no idea you were so so clever."

"Years of practice on Chris has brought me to this perfection." Kit smiled at her old playfellow who was looking at Maurice keenly, though Captain Montgomery was not aware of the scrutiny. "How many times I wonder Chris have I made you respectable for society?"

"My memory is bad," Chris said, and he lounged off towards the farthest end of the hall, while Maurice walked with Kit up to the fireplace where a huge fire was blazing in the wide old-fashioned grate.

"You are ungrateful!" Kit had called laughingly after Chris, and Maurice had answered in a low voice that was not quite steady.

"And you are an angel to your friends!"

The girl stood silent a moment. The firelight danced and gleamed on her graceful figure, touching her delicate throat and arms, and striking an answering fire from her diamonds and her eyes. Suddenly she looked at him.

"Why should we not be friends?" she said, her voice eloquent with all that she longed to make him to understand.

Maurice drew a deep breath. A moment before his good influences had been at work within him, and had worked so well that he had almost become what Kit hoped she should find him; but, at the sight of her beauty in the near presence of her young loveliness and fascination, these good influence broke away and vanished altogether.

"Impossible!" was all he said, but that one word carried a volume of meaning.

Kit turned pale and trembled a little but her courage did not desert her.

"Maurice!" she said quietly, coldly, "I must speak to you. I have something to say to you. Something I cannot say now. Will you listen to me?"

"All my life," he answered in a dogged way, and with a look in his eyes that almost warned her of the hopelessness of the task she had set herself.

Kit laughed a little nervously.

"I do not want so long an audience," she said, with that self-contained power and dignity which maddened him beyond expression.

"I only want half-an-hour. What I have to say will not in fact take nearly so long. I promise not to bore you."

She drew away suddenly from him and from the look in his eyes.

Her heart sank as she asked him casually to follow her into the drawing-room; she would make her attempt, but she knew for certain she would fail.

"He will not help me, and it will have to be open warfare. My poor Philip and my poor Sybil!" she said to herself.

Chris, lounging at the bottom of the hall, suddenly called to her.

"Can you come here, I want to speak to you?" he asked. Kit turned back at once and Chris put his arm through her's and drew her to a corner.

"Look here, old girl," he said, in his rough boyish fashion, "I want to ask you a great favour!"

"It is granted," Kit replied without any hesitation.

"Wait till you hear what it is," Chris said, quietly. He paused a moment and then he gave vent to his feelings. "Look here!" his favourite expression. "I know you think I am only a boy, and of course I am no good, but I just want you to know that if I am a boy I need not necessarily be a fool and——"

"Chris!" Kit was regarding him with absolute astonishment.

Chris lowered his voice considerably.

"Look here! I can see as far through a brick wall as most people, and I can see that you are worrying yourself into fiddlestrings, and all over something to do with that stuck up chap Montgomery. Now, Kit, I am your eldest friend, we've stuck to each other through thick and thin, and this is what I want to say. Just chuck this trouble on to my shoulders, they are bigger than your's, and I can meet a man better than you."

"Dear Chris!" there were tears in Kit's eyes. She was deeply touched. "Suppose I say you are right, suppose there is trouble—what—could you do?"

"I could punch his head for him ordinarily speaking, but," Chris spoke now with real gravity, "but I know this is not that sort of worry, it's something bigger—you are letting it change all your life. I know you won't mind my saying all this because we have always spoken out our minds to one another you and I—and so I speak now, and it does me good. Look here, Kit, if you won't let me know what the bother is for Heaven's sake don't keep anything from Sir Philip, he is the proper person.

"Oh! I know—I know," Kit cried, with a return of all the old anxiety, "and so I would speak, Chris, but I can't—you don't understand—you don't know."

"I am sure your husband must be the right person to go to in any trouble," Chris answered, gently, "and I think perhaps I do know and do understand, better than you imagine. Anyhow, I have my own opinion about Captain Montgomery, and I call him a blackguard and a coward—for two pins I'd tell him so to his face but I can't do anything unless you let me speak."

Kit answered nothing to this, for at that moment Sybil came down the stairs, and she ran to greet her, but there was a distinct feeling of comfort as she looked back at Chris, awkward figure and honest face and remembered his staunch friendship.

The evening passed almost cheerily, and Philip felt the last remnant of anxiety slip away from him as he beheld his darling smiling and happy with a faint colour in her cheeks, and the light deepening and shining in her glorious eyes.

"It is a happy omen for our future and our home," he thought.

And even while he thought this shadow was close at hand.

[CHAPTER XXX.

Christmas Day came and went. It was passed very quietly but very pleasantly on the whole. Kit kneeling beside her husband in the old-fashioned church, sent up an earnest prayer for guidance and for comfort in the one trial that had come into her great, her wonderful happiness.

Though there were no festivities in the house party, Sir Philip determined not to deprive the servants of their usual gaiety on Boxing Day. The great hall was turned for the nonce into a ball-room, and the servants flocked thither for their annual dance.

Kit had to open the ball with the butler, and Sir Philip took the plump housekeeper, and the rest of the party scattered themselves impartially among the domestics.

Nothing more had happened between Kit and Maurice. There had been no opportunity for the conversation she had desired, and, indeed, the girl was beginning to doubt if she would follow out this move at all.

Maurice's easy manner, and the return to his old genial self gave her a sort of false idea that perhaps there would be no need of drastic measures after all, and yet every now and then, as she caught sight of his eye, she felt the hopelessness of this thought.

But she had determined to crush down all the weakness that had beset her in the beginning, and she determined, moreover, to face the difficulty without flinching.

She was very sick at heart sometimes when she saw the affection Philip lavished on Maurice, and how her husband would let his hand rest on the young man's shoulder in a way that spoke of friendship and love.

The contempt she felt for Maurice deepened and grew, and at moments she lashed herself with this same scorn.

"Why did I not tell Philip all. I am no better than that man. I am a traitor to the best and most honourable being in the world!"

Constance watched them narrowly. She was not at all pleased with Maurice, instead of accepting her as an ally he avoided her. She felt, now and then, far from sure of him, for, after all, there was more good in Maurice than there was in her, and she knew that he had moments when the best of his manhood arose and fought against the wickedness she was so determined to see carried out.

She had said nothing more to Philip since

that remark in the train. She was waiting for the future to develop.

Once during the servant's ball the house party danced together, and Sir Philip found himself *vis à vis* with Kit, he having Constance for a partner, and she dancing with Maurice.

Kit was flushed with the excitement, and her eyes kept company with her feet.

"Your prophecy has been fulfilled, Miss Marlowe," Philip said, as they chatted together on trivial things. "Kit looks another creature. I think I shall have to renounce the thought of a permanent home in town, it is evident it does not agree with my little girl!"

Constance smiled mechanically. She was looking her prettiest.

"I wonder you can settle down into domesticity so easily, Sir Philip. Do you never have a yearning to be off on your travels once more?"

"Not since my marriage," Philip replied, although, I will confess to you, Miss Marlowe, I did have one wild longing this very morning. I must enlighten you. I had an invitation from ——," mentioning a celebrated and most distinguished explorer, "begging me to go out and join his new expedition without delay."

"But of course you refused?" Constance said, lightly.

Philip laughed.

"Well, my letter is not gone yet; but I don't think it will be necessary to tell you the purport of it. I have found my treasure here greater than any I could possibly find elsewhere. No, my wanderings are over, and I am glad of it."

Constance smiled vaguely. She was casting about in her mind for something to say to disturb him as successfully as she had done the other day.

As she saw the easy way in which Kit and Maurice were talking together an idea came to her.

"So they have made up their quarrel," she said, lightly, and with an amused air. "They are a couple of children!"

"They, who?" Philip asked, in surprise. "A quarrel! What between Kit and Montgomery. Oh! surely you must be mistaken, they have not quarrelled!"

"Oh! I see," Constance laughed, "they did not let you into the secret. I expect they thought you would make fun of them; but they did quarrel. Oh! yes, I assure you they had quite a fierce battle, though I don't know what the cause was!"

Philip knit his brows, and looked keenly at the two opposite. Something, he could not have exactly said, what hurt him in a vague, swift, yet decided fashion.

Perhaps it was the look in Maurice's eyes as they rested on the beautiful form beside him, or the expression on Kit's face. At once there came a return of the doubt and discomfort that had followed on Constance's other speech.

The dance ended, and he walked with Miss Marlowe to find a seat. He was rather silent, but Constance did not seem to mind it, she talked on lightly on a variety of subjects; and then her eyes flashed, her breath came quick and fast, she had caught a glimpse of Maurice walking beside Kit towards the conservatory.

They were going to have an interview, Maurice would be won by the girl's eloquence, he would draw back, he would fail her at the last.

Constance had no trust in Maurice, and her revenge had never seemed to her so necessary as now, when it might perhaps slip from her.

She set her teeth.

"You promised to show me that wonderful African plant you brought home on your last expedition, Sir Philip. It is here, is it not?"

"In the conservatory," Philip answered, almost mechanically. "I will take you there if you like, Miss Marlowe. It is nothing very marvellous to look at although it is so rare; but that is often the case, is it not?"

"Indeed, yes," Constance answered, with a tinge of sadness in her gentle voice. "The most beautiful things about us are so often the most worthless. It is not a happy thought, Sir Philip, but it is alas! a true one."

"You are too young to be a pessimist," Philip answered, though he spoke abstractedly.

Constance's words had produced a strange effect on his mind. At another time the remark she had made about a quarrel between Maurice Montgomery and Kit would have produced nothing but amusement, but now why—or how he could not have properly explained. It made him uncomfortable, and produced the same trouble and doubt that had come when she had suggested a possible mental ailment as causing the very visible change that had come over Kit of late. Odds and ends of small circumstances that had been so trivial at the time of occurrence as to make no impression upon him rose in his mind now.

It seemed to him that there had always been a certain constraint between his young wife and the young man whom he had regarded in the light of his ward for so long. Most decidedly if they had not been openly antagonistic to one another there had been no interchange of cordial feeling such as would have been so natural everything considered.

Then came that remembrance of Kit's almost shocked remonstrance when he had mentioned the fact of Maurice and Sybil joining the Courtfield party. He had been astonished by both her words and her tone of voice, but the excuse she had given him had swept this away.

Now, however, with Constance's remark ringing in his ears he seemed to understand what had then puzzled him for a moment, and then his thoughts changed.

If there had been a quarrel, and to Philip it did not appear in the least possible, there could have been one, for to begin with neither had enough acquaintance with the other to have much difference of opinion (it argues a certain amount of intimacy to encourage quarrelling), Kit would most assuredly have brought the fact of the matter to his knowledge. She was so open in everything, was it likely she would be silent on a point which she must know full well would be one of keen interest to him?

No, he would dismiss the idea from his thoughts; at least, he would dismiss it until he was alone with Kit by and by, and then he would tell her what Constance had said. Perhaps he would speak of her health, and if there was any little trouble at work in her mind he would woo it from her and set her at rest.

A sudden distaste for the presence of the fair, gentle-looking creature by his side began to oppress Philip. All his former objection to Constance and her character returned to him.

He wished heartily he had never allowed his kindness of heart to overrule his judgment, and let this beautiful, untrustworthy woman have any place, even the very smallest in his daily life.

He had tried her, and found her absolutely wanting once, that should have been sufficient, though he did not fear her a second time. Still, she had managed to give him a *mauvais quart d'heure* with her suggestions and insinuations, and if he did not doubt the innocent manner in which these had been given he could not forget the pain she had caused him.

However, she was his guest, and she was also in his power, and Philip Desmond was the last man in the world to set on one side his duty as a host or withdraw his generosity once it had been given.

Constance watched him carefully, while, with a sharp glance, she traced Maurice and Kit, and calculated exactly how to act.

The conservatory was built in a three-cornered sort of way, having only one entrance, however, and if any one or two persons gathered in one particular spot no one who had entered before them could pass out until they moved.

Constance, quickening her steps, gave a sudden exclamation and went forward up to the farthest bend of the conservatory.

"What a magnificent palm, Sir Philip!" she cried, stopping in front of a superb specimen of the fan-leafed tree. "Surely this is new? I was in here this morning and did not notice it, and I could hardly have helped seeing it, could I? It must have been put here later!"

"Marston has brought it up from his storehouse, I expect. You must make love to my head gardener, Miss Marlowe. He is a great man in his way, and has the most marvellous inventions of his own to perfect his plants. This is certainly, as you say, a very magnificent palm. I should not be surprised if my little one were to cast covetous eyes on it, and have it moved into the hall or to some other part of the house."

Constance bit her lip suddenly.

The tone of his voice, laden with unchanged devotion and love, told her her second coup had miscarried, although at first it had seemed as if she had succeeded most fully in planting the seeds of doubt in the man's mind.

She was not so annoyed at this as she might have been. She knew that Kit and Maurice, if given time and nothing happened to prevent him from hearing them, would most certainly condemn themselves in Philip's most vigorous care and eyes.

She continued discussing the palm with a sincerity of admiration which did her great credit until the sound of a woman's skirts on the marble floor proclaimed her victim was close at hand.

She moved yet a little further into the corner, and Philip followed her as in duty bound, answering her questions and giving her information till all at once he stopped.

Voices were sounding close beside him.

Maurice's voice, thick with anger and something else that made the strong man's heart within him turn cold and sick, and Kit's voice answering cold but not quite steady with a sort of entreaty in its tone.

Philip stood rivetted to the ground like a figure of marble or stone. He forgot Constance's presence—he forgot everything but the hideous truth, which those whispering voices brought so suddenly and forcibly to his knowledge.

Maurice's voice was loud, as though the passion within him would have its vent.

"Yes," he said, "yes, I refuse your friendship, Kit. I will not have it when I have had so much."

Kit broke in suddenly.

"You are a coward, Maurice!—a coward!—a coward! Now I despise you. I have no words to tell you how much I despise you!"

Maurice laughed bitterly.

"You can call me hard names if you like; but you can't deny the truth, deny that you loved me before you met Philip Desmond, that you loved me better than your life itself, and——"

Constance stood suddenly before the man as he moved a step forward.

"Philip," she cried, almost voicelessly, "Philip——"

He shrank back from her. She was speaking rapidly. He did not know what she was saying; he was only conscious of a flood of words, and of a maddening sensation that she prevented him from hearing what Kit was saying. Constance was quick to feel that Kit's words might react on Maurice's impassioned ones; she did not intend to let the faintest chance escape her now.

Philip drew a deep breath, then he put her gently on one side and went forward.

He raised his voice as he went.

"Stop," he said, and the sound of that voice drove the blood from Kit's face and heart, "Stop, what more has to be said on this subject, must be said before me."

He stood before them pale as death, grown

suddenly old and grey as it were in a moment. Maurice flushed crimson for an instant, then grew pale as he and Kit sprang towards him with a low cry of sorrow and yet of joy.

"Philip, Philip!" she said, his name escaping her like a sigh.

She clung to his hand; but shrank from him as she found no responsive touch. It was as though she had approached some marble figure, so silent and mute did he stand, so heedless was he of her touch.

Philip looked at Maurice; he would not let his eyes rest on that girlish loveliness, which up to a few seconds before had been so precious, so exquisite in its purity and youthfulness.

"Be good enough to come to my study," he said, quietly, coldly, to the young man. "This is scarcely a place for delicate confidence. I have still some concern for my honour in my household if others have not, follow me."

He turned as he spoke without a word or a look at Kit.

She threw herself before him with a cry. The expression of her eyes was magnificent in its sudden horror and anguish. There was the startled look of a suffering child in their depths; but Philip did not look at her, did not speak to her.

At this moment he was conscious only of a great horror for her, of a great contempt for himself. So after all she had tricked and deceived him! Her innocence, her fragrant young loveliness had been but a lie to blind his eyes and his judgment. She was another Constance, the same blood ran in their veins. What a fool he had been, what a fool!

He was not sane in this moment; he lost the key-note of his nature as it were; he who had all his life been gentle as a woman, even while his man's strength had been gigantic, who had ever tempered his justice with mercy, who had shown consideration to the most contemptible of his enemies. He became for the moment a brute. Without a muttered oath he pushed the girl roughly on one side, so roughly that she almost staggered and fell, and with a backward peremptory look at Maurice he strode out of the conservatory, followed by Captain Montgomery who now that it was too late felt the shame and horror of what he had done rush full upon him.

He could not look at Kit, the sight of her face would be more than he could bear, but he did look at Constance, and the evil triumph that shone in her clear, cold eyes gave the spur to his conscience that was not altogether dead. Jealousy, selfish passion all gave way before the more honourable, the more manly feelings which his late sense of honour awakened in him.

He would be true to this honour now, he would put out his hand to save her, not to thrust her still further into the blackness of despair.

Alas! Maurice had to learn, as we all learn sooner or later, that if we pass by the right moment of right actions, time and fate arise against us and put difficulties in our path, on which we had never counted.

As the two men passed away, Constance moved forward to where the girl stood, trembling in every limb, her joyous beauty as it were from her face for ever a misery, a desolation too great for words written in the depths of her magnificent eyes.

Miss Marlowe felt not a grain of pity for her unconscious rival and her victim, but she did not mean to show her hand yet, the last card had been played, but the game was not utterly won.

"Kit, dear Kit, come with me, you can't stay here; someone will come, and you don't want everybody to know you are having a quarrel with Philip. Dear, do come!"

Kit did not look at her cousin. Her brain was a misery of pain and bewilderment, yet she was conscious of a sense of discomfort in Constance's presence.

"Please leave me," she said quietly, coldly.

It was all she could say, and she repeated it several times, till at last Constance lost patience, and with a shrug of her shoulders, swept away without another word.

As she reached the hall, she looked back to where the girlish figure stood like some statue devoid of life, the light falling on the glorious coronet of hair and on the dead whiteness of the young stricken face.

"Good-bye to your happiness, Lady Desmond," Constance cried, ironically, under her breath. "Your reign has not been long. You may try your best, but you will never get your kingdom again after this night's work. I hope you will enjoy your future, my dear cousin!"

As if the malicious purport of her thoughts came to Kit's sensitive mind, the girl shivered, then gave a cry and covered her face with her hands, crouching back in her corner so that none might see her.

Greatness, prosperity, success, all that made the sum of her life; what were they to her in comparison with Philip's love—the love of the man who was her very life, her very motive of existence, this wonderful, exquisite love which was lost to her for ever now?

It was an hour of the most terrible suffering, and in such an hour was it a marvel that the child should pray for death as the one solution to the most awful problem that had come to her!

(To be continued.)

HER FATHER'S SECRET.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—*(continued.)*

"I FELL into bad company, Nelly," he said, excusingly. "I never could say no when anybody wanted me to do anything. But you won't give me up, will you?" he added, anxiously, his fears returning to him. "It's penal servitude, you know."

"No, father, I won't give you up. But you must go away——"

"I can't. I've nowhere to go. I've no money, and I'm tired and hungry. Won't your mistress let me stay in yon large house? Stay, no, she mustn't know I am there. Put me in your room, Nelly, that's a dear, good girl. I won't harm anyone, and I'll go away when the search for me is over."

The proposition was utterly abhorrent to Nelly, but her father pleaded so strongly, and urged his danger with such evident fear, that she at last began to waver in her resolution to deny him.

"It is nearly dark now," he said, "and I could slip into the house without being seen. Save me, Nelly——"

"I will save you, father," interrupted the girl, "if you will make this night the turning-point of your career. If you escape your pursuers will you lead a new and better life? Will you forsake your bad associates and become an honest man?"

"I will—I will!"

"Then I will do my best to save you. I wish I could speak with my mistress about you, but I haven't any opportunity now, for Sir Hugh is with her. I hardly dare take you into the house unknown to her," and Nelly looked troubled, her father's avowed crime recurring to her mind. "Why don't you go to Sir Allyn Dare, father?"

The man raised his head quick and suspiciously.

"What do you know about Sir Allyn Dare?" he asked.

"You nursed the late Sir Allyn in his last illness!"

The face of Shaweross became the colour of parchment.

"I know—I remember!" he said, huskily. "There is a gold-mine for me at Edencourt, if I choose to work it. I can make you rich, Nelly, and I will, if you'll befriend me, now!"

"Sir Allyn is very anxious to see you," declared Nelly, not heeding her father's promise and assertion. "Miss Dare came here herself one day last week to try and find out your whereabouts. She is very anxious to find you, and Lord Tressilian has gone to London to look for you!"

"It is all found out then?" cried Shaweross, looking around him like a hunted deer for some hiding-place.

"What is found out, father?"

"The—the conspiracy! Therwell or Hoadley has confessed. I can see it all. Everything is down on me at once. And I'm betrayed! Oh, Nelly, I shall be hanged, and I never meant to do it. Hide me somewhere—quick!"

He came up to her and caught her hand, clinging to it as a drowning man clings to a rope. His ghastly face, his starting eyes, and his hurried breathing all proclaimed his abject and extreme terror.

Nelly shrank back affrighted.

"They will hang me for murder!" almost shrieked Shaweross, in his anguish. "I am innocent, Nelly. Save me, save me!"

The girl felt a feeling of pity for him even amidst her alarm and horror. After all, he was her father and he had been kind to her in her childhood. Her mother had loved him. For her mother's sake she would shelter and defend him. He could not have been guilty of the incredible crime of which he accused himself. She would take him to her room and give him food, and then go to her mistress with the whole story and solicit her advice.

Thus resolving, Nelly opened the gate and bade him enter the lane. He obeyed hurriedly, as if the officers of justice were at his heels.

"Follow me now as quietly as possible," said the girl.

Shaweross muttered that he would be as silent as he could.

Nelly then turned into the pretty grove, now dark and gloomy, and her father followed at her heels. She could not again permit him to touch her hand, for his fingers felt cold and clammy to her touch, as if there were blood upon them, but he took hold of the fringe to her shawl for guidance, and kept muttering his gratitude for her unlooked-for kindness.

They traversed the grove and came out upon the lawn, upon which the night shadows lay heavily. The house was now brilliantly lighted, and sounds of music floated out to the two as they stood there—the one so crime laden, the other so anxious and troubled.

Nelly could see that several of the servants were in the wide front hall, listening to the unwonted music of their young mistress's voice, and prominent among the listeners were Watkins and Baker.

"We must go round," she whispered, leading the way.

Shaweross followed submissively.

The servants' hall, they discovered, was well tenanted, sounds of mirth issuing from the windows, and Nelly went boldly up to the back entrance, glided along the darkened passage, without meeting anyone, and conducted her father up to her own room.

It was a pleasant little chamber upon the first floor, and in the rear of the suite appropriated by Lady Chellis. The young bride had had this room fitted up for her maid that she might always be near at hand, and had taken great pleasure in beautifying it, as, in a small part, a reward for her foster-sister's devotion. The furniture was all extremely plain and simple, but good and well-shaped; the carpet was of bright Brussels; and there were excellent engravings, a pretty work-table, a few vases, and an easy-chair.

These adornments were all revealed when Nelly had lighted her globe-lamp on the centre table.

Shaweross looked about him in surprise and delight, and said, as he took possession of the easy-chair,—

"It's years since I've seen such a room as this. You ought to be happy here, Nelly. Your mistress must think a great deal of you."

"She does, but not nearly so much as I think of her," declared the maid, her face lighting up with affection for Lady Chellis. "I love her better than my own life, and she loves me far more than I deserve."

"If I had something to eat now," suggested Shawoross.

"I will see if I can gain access to the store-room," said Nelly. "Do not stir from the room while I am gone. I will be back directly."

She withdrew, hastening upon her unpleasant errand.

When she had gone her father arose and bathed his face and hands at the wash-stand and brushed out his shaggy locks with Nelly's neat brushes, and tied anew the worn, black neckerchief encircling his throat.

These improvements had hardly been effected when his daughter returned with something hidden under her apron. The something proved to be a dish containing the remains of a pasty and a bottle half filled with French wine. She placed these upon the table and bade him eat.

He caught up the bottle eagerly, and did not pause until he had drained it. He then applied himself to the task of devouring the food, and soon succeeded in clearing the dish of its contents.

"I feel as if I had gained new strength," he said, pushing the table from him. "You are going to let me sleep here, ain't you, Nelly?"

And he glanced at the pretty white bed.

"I must see what my lady says," was the response. When she comes up I will tell her——"

"You will betray me?" cried Shawoross, in terror.

"Hush, don't speak so loud," said Nelly, warningly. "I must tell my mistress. Did you think I would keep you here without her knowledge?"

"But she will send me away," said the man, whiningly. "She won't have me here. Don't tell her, Nelly. You can sleep with one of the maids, and no one need suspect my presence."

"My lady must know it," declared Nelly, firmly. "She will do what is just and right. There's no use in talking, father, I shall tell her."

Shawoross had recourse to tears and promises, but his daughter feeling an instinctive distrust of him, and being warned by his revelations, refused to yield to his prayers. She assured him that in the event of his being sent away she would give him money to defray his travelling expenses and to support himself, and then withdrew to attend to her usual evening duties in Lady Chellis's apartments.

On being left alone the unhappy man gave way to despair.

He wept, believing that he would be given up to justice, and called Nelly an unnatural daughter who wished to betray him, and bemoaned his hard lot, without a thought that he richly deserved it.

An hour passed, his tears were dried, and he began to look for Nelly's return, forgetting the earliness of the hour. He arose, opened the door slightly and listened for footsteps or the sound of voices.

For some time he listened in vain.

At length his unnaturally quick hearing distinguished the sound of horses' hoofs on the carriage path, and, in an agony of apprehension, he crept out into the deserted hall, and continued listening. There was the sound of opening and closing the front door, and then, as he stood nearly at the head of the grand staircase, the tones of a rich, eager young voice floated up to him.

It was the voice of Lord Tressilian.

"Is there a man named Shawoross, here?" the Viscount was saying. "I have tracked him almost to this place from London. His daughter is Lady Chellis's maid. He must be here!"

"Tracked—tracked!" muttered the miserable fugitive, clutching at the railing of the balusters.

He heard, as in a dream, the sound of the drawing-room door as it opened; he heard Sir Hugh Chellis's voice greeting warmly his noble visitor, and then he heard again the speech with which Lord Tressilian had first startled him.

"I know nothing of such a person," he heard Sir Hugh reply. "But we will summon Nelly. Come in, my lord."

"Summon Nelly!" whispered Shawoross. "She said she should tell. What shall I do? Where shall I go?"

He looked about him, like a wild beast, with a strange glare in his eyes and a desperate look on his features.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Thou mays't repent.
And one bad act, with many deeds well done,
May st cover. *Milton*

For a moment Shawoross continued to look about him with the wild glare of a hunted beast. He did not dare to return to Nelly's chamber, lest his daughter should betray his presence there and deliver him up to his supposed enemies. His one thought, his one prayer, was to see her, and beseech her to deny all knowledge of his whereabouts. As he stood, thus agonised, with a cold dew on his forehead, and his knees knocking together, his gaze suddenly fell upon a half-open door at the right of the wide hall, and close at hand. Through the aperture he caught a glimpse of a lighted and luxurious boudoir, such as could belong alone to the mistress of the dwelling.

Nelly must be within that room. She had said she was going to Lady Chellis's apartments. If he could only see the girl he felt sure that she would save him.

These thoughts passed swiftly through his mind, and, with a wild impulse to throw himself upon the mercy of his daughter, before she could be summoned to attend her master and mistress in the drawing room, he stepped forward to the door, and called out, quickly and sharply,—

"Nelly!"

There was no response.

"She must be here," he said to himself in a hushed whisper. "I know she is here!"

He pushed open the door softly and looked in. The room was bathed in a soft glow of light; two easy-chairs were drawn up before the hearth, upon which a small fire sparkled cheerily, for although a spring night it was chilly without; the curtains completely concealed the windows. It seemed ready for occupancy, but as yet was untenanted.

He drew a sobbing sort of sigh.

A door at the opposite side of the room attracted his attention. Without a moment's hesitation, he softly crossed the room, and looked into the adjoining chamber. It was the dressing-room of Lady Chellis, and was also brilliantly lighted, wax candles gleaming from silver sconces on the mantelpiece, and from the tall, glittering candelabra, whose glass pendants reflected the light like great jewels.

But Nelly was not there.

Shawoross looked upon the luxurious scene, scarcely comprehending it. He saw that there was still an inner chamber, probably a bed-room, and he was about to penetrate it, in his utter desperation, when his attention was attracted to the lace-draped dressing-table, upon which lay a large ebony jewel-case.

It was open, as Nelly had left it an instant before, and his eager gaze caught the sparkle and glitter of liquid diamonds, the soft glimmer of pearls, the purple gleam of great amethysts, the deep glow of emeralds, and the crimson fire of burning carbuncles.

It was a sight to attract attention, and, perhaps, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the fugitive lost sight for a moment of the object of his search and crept nearer, with stealthy and guilty movements.

How mockingly, yet how temptingly, the jewels sparkled, glowed, and gleamed in the soft, full light.

He crept very close, feasting his eyes, and thinking what a mine of wealth he had stumbled upon. He took up in his hands the sparkling jewels that had been pledged to Sir Hugh, in lieu of the promised money, and held them in his great horny fingers, exulting in the glorious flashing of rays, the grand coruscation of colour, and their perfect reflection of light.

"If I had only this," he muttered, his eyes brightening. "I should be right so long as I live, Lady Chellis wouldn't miss it. I should never have to thieve again. I could be as honest as anyone, and be respected, and have the comforts of life!"

He paused, a vague idea crossing his mind that he might ruin the prospects of his daughter by appropriating anything that had been placed in her charge. It also occurred to him that it would be the worst of crimes to violate the unconscious hospitality of the lady at whose expense he had been fed and refreshed. But Shawoross was not a man long to entertain delicate scruples of honour.

"The thing is here," he said to himself, "right in my way, and I'd be a fool not to take it. Let Nelly look after herself as I've done. I can't find the girl; I haven't a minute to spare; and I must escape at once. I have no money—I must take the necklace!"

He turned his back resolutely upon the remaining gems, opened his shabby jacket, and prepared to consign the fiery, sparkling necklace to some secret hiding-place about his person.

It trembled in his hands, which shook like great brown leaves in the autumn wind, when the door of the bed-chamber opened, and Nelly unexpectedly made her appearance.

Caught in the very act of robbing his daughter's benefactress, the guilty man stood transfixed, the costly ornament falling to his feet in a glittering heap.

Nelly stood on the threshold for a moment appalled. Then comprehending the case, she leaped forward, with a cry like that a mother might give when robbed of her babes, and caught up the string of jewels with one hand, while, with the other, she clutched her father fiercely by the arm.

"You ungrateful man!" she cried, indignantly. "What do you mean by this treachery? You would rob my mistress, would you? I've a great mind to summon the servants, and give you up as a thief and robber that you are——"

"Oh, don't, Nelly!" cried her father, overcome with terror at the threat. "I wasn't going to rob anybody. I—I was only looking at it——"

"What are you doing in these rooms?" demanded the girl, harshly, restoring the ornament to the jewel-case, and locking the latter securely.

"I came in search of you, Nelly. They've tracked me here. Your master said he would send for you and ask you if you had seen me here. I heard them at the top of the stairs. Tell them you haven't seen me, Nelly, and don't know where I am."

"I shall not tell a falsehood!" replied Nelly, coldly.

"If Sir Hugh asks me, I shall say that you have been here."

"You will betray me, will you?" half shrieked the wretched being.

"No, for I shall not know where you are. You must leave here at once. I will not harbour you under this roof another hour for all the wealth of Cœsus. If you had gone away with that necklace of my lady's I should have killed myself. I will never forgive your treachery and ingratitude."

"But you will help me?" interrupted her

father, who did not care for forgiveness, so long as he received the aid he needed.

"Yes, I will help you. Come back to my room."

She turned abruptly and led him by the way he had come to the hall. Here they paused a moment, hearing voices below, and fearing that someone might ascend the stairs in time to see the fugitive.

"We must move boldly," declared Nelly, almost as pale as her father, but far more self-possessed.

With a quick, light step she hastened along the hall, Shaweross keeping at her side. He was in a panic of excitement and did not breathe freely until they had gained the precincts of the girl's chamber.

"Stay here till I come for you!" said the girl. "I must see if the back entrance is clear for your escape. If you leave the room before I come, you will do so at your peril!"

"You—you are not going to betray me?" faltered Shaweross.

His daughter answered only by a look of scorn, and withdrew from the room. The miserable man crouched behind the door during her absence, with a desperate look in his eyes, and with his ears applied closely to the chink above the lower hinge, that he might hear every sound in the corridor.

The murmur of voices came to his hearing; one of them he distinguished as that of his daughter.

"Sir Hugh desires you to come to the drawing-room, Miss Nelly!" someone was saying.

"I will come directly," Nelly responded, quietly, "as soon as I've smoothed my hair a bit."

Then the speakers moved away, and Shaweross was left to solitude and misery. The minutes passed, dragging on like hours, to the guilty fugitive, and at last, Nelly returned, paler than before, but more quiet.

"The servants are in the lower hall," she said, "and you cannot escape by the front door. The back hall, by which we entered is occupied by several of the men and women, who are discussing the probability of your being in the house, and wondering what you have done and why you are wanted. The garden door is locked, and Watkins has been summoned to the drawing-room. Every door, you see, is guarded, and you cannot even get downstairs!"

Shaweross uttered a wild, wailing cry, and rocked himself to and fro in his anguish, Never very strong-minded, his faculties seemed almost to desert him under the present combination of untoward circumstances, and he could only weep and moan.

"Hush!" said his daughter, in a quick decided tone, that had the effect of a sudden douche bath upon him. "Don't be foolish. I did not say there was no way of escape. I hurried out into the garden, and found a long ladder, which the gardener had been using to-day while training the ivy-vines. It is tall enough to reach my window, so I dragged it along, and leaned it against the house. Do you think you can descend the ladder?"

"Yes, yes," cried Shaweross, catching eagerly at the prospect of escape. "I know I can!"

Nelly looked doubtfully at the trembling figure, whose strength had departed during his years of excess and dissipation. He was, physically, but the wreck of a man, and did not seem to have sufficient vigour or steadiness for the task of climbing. Trusting that his excitement would lend him artificial strength, the girl proceeded to the window, pushed it up softly, and looked out.

The night was moderately dark, there being no moon, and but a few stars visible. The lawn was darkened by the thick shadows of the trees and the grove that bordered it. There was no person within sight. For all these favouring circumstances Nelly breathed a prayer of thankfulness.

"Go now, father!" she said, withdrawing her head. "The ladder is set firmly. Be careful not to fall, for there is a pave walk underneath. Now go,"

"But the money, Nelly?"

The girl took from her pocket a small portemonnaie, which she placed silently in his hands. Even at that moment he could not resist the impulse to open it, fearful that she might be deceiving him. The gleam of gold and the rustling of bank-notes rewarded his search, and, muttering his thanks, put the gift in his pocket.

Then he advanced to the window, and looked out.

"It's a long way down, Nelly," he said, shivering and trembling. "I wish I could walk out the way I came."

"But you can't, father."

"I might fall, you know," he said, when he had placed one leg over the window-sill. "It's a long time since I climbed. I think I haven't since I was a boy. I—I am afraid, Nelly."

He looked up into the girl's face, hoping that she would suggest some easier mode of exit, but she replied to his pleading look with a gaze so cold and stern that he shrank from her, muttering that she looked strangely like her dead mother.

With some effort and much trepidation, Shaweross dragged his other leg over the window-sill and stood leaning upon the casement, his feet resting upon the third round of the ladder.

He seemed scarcely loathe to depart. The unaccustomed mode of descent struck terror to his soul. He feared he should fall. He had not a good footing, and his hands trembled so that he could hardly cling to the windows. He was sure he could never cling to those narrow rounds, that his hands had not sufficient "grip" in them to close firmly around them.

All these things he urged, as he hung there, in trembling tones, and whitening face.

"Come in then, father," said Nelly, impatiently. "I am sure I can't think of any other way to get you out."

At this juncture a peremptory knock sounded on Nelly's door, and the voice of one of the servants loudly informed her that Sir Hugh had expressed surprise at her non-appearance and had again sent to summon her attendance, adding,—

"If you don't come, they will come up to you. I think they are coming now."

Shaweross uttered a ringing shriek, partly because of his horror at this intelligence, and partly because, in his first surprise, he had started violently, and so loosened his hold on the window.

He endeavoured to recover his balance, to brace anew his feet, but his hand slipped, he tottered, and leaned outward, falling headlong to the ground.

His shriek was echoed by his affrighted daughter, who frantically opened her door, and rushed down the stairs to his assistance.

The servants, comprehending something of the truth from the double shriek, and the girl's wildness, followed closely behind her.

"Dead, dead!" cried Nelly, as she gained the paved path upon which her father lay, helpless and motionless, and knelt beside him.

A faint groan issued from his lips.

"He is not dead," said she, with hysterical tears and laughter. "Somebody go for a doctor. What shall I do with him?"

Instead of replying to this question, the awed servants moved aside respectfully, giving place to Sir Hugh Chellis and Lord Tressilian, who had heard the disturbance and hastened to learn its cause.

"It is Nelly's father, who has fallen from the ladder, Sir Hugh," said Baker, the footman, in a very low tone.

"It is Shaweross—found at last," said Lord Tressilian.

The injured man opened his eyes feebly and looked up with a pleading expression.

"Lift him carefully and carry him into the front hall," commanded Sir Hugh, promptly. "Bring a mattress, some of you."

Three or four of the servants sprang to do their young master's bidding. The baronet then stooped down to the wounded man, and said,—

"No one shall hurt you, Shaweross. You shall be lifted very carefully."

"It is not that," whispered the fugitive. "Don't send me to prison. Don't let them take me up for the murder. I am innocent——"

"Have no fears," said Sir Hugh, gently. "You are not going to prison now. If you wish it, I will be your friend."

The mattress had now arrived, and Shaweross was carefully placed upon it—the operation costing him little pain, as he felt benumbed—and carried to the front hall, and deposited upon a broad couch, in front of which two chairs were placed.

Restoratives were administered to him by Sir Hugh and Lord Tressilian, and the former despatched a servant at once to West Hoxton, with orders to bring back with him a physician and a magistrate.

The throng of servants were waved back from the rude couch, and the young Viscount, bending over the injured man, regarded him with a look so earnest and full of emotion that Shaweross looked at him in wonder.

"Why do you look at me so?" he asked, uneasily. "Are the men going to carry me to prison?"

Lord Tressilian shook his head, and returned,—

"What men?"

"The men who came here for me a little while ago."

"I came for you, but I am alone," said his lordship. "I did not come to take you to prison. I have been searching for you during the past week in London, and have offered rewards for you, and have advertised everywhere. I followed you from town, two of your companions having put me on your track. But you need not be afraid of me. I shall not harm you."

Shaweross wonderingly and feebly expressed his gratitude.

"I shall not harm you," continued Lord Tressilian, in clear, sweet tones that were as soothing as evening chimes, "and you have nothing to fear from anyone else on earth. But are you prepared to enter the other world, Shaweross—that world where sin and guilt are punished, if not repented of and atoned for here?"

"I am not going to die," moaned Shaweross, his lips quivering with sudden dread. "I am not in pain. I think I didn't get hurt. Nothing ails me, only I feel numb!"

"It is the numbness of death that is creeping over you!" declared Lord Tressilian, solemnly and pityingly.

Shaweross uttered a groan of anguish, and cried out that it could not be true, that he was not in pain, and that he would soon be well. He attempted to rise on his elbow, but could not lift himself an inch from the mattress. Then he turned a wild, questioning look about him and encountered the solemn faces of Sir Hugh and Lord Tressilian and the tearful ones of Lady Chellis and his daughter Nelly.

That brief survey brought the truth home to his soul.

"Oh, I can't die," he said, the tears forcing themselves through his now half-shut eyelids. "I am not fit to die. I have been wicked all my life——"

"Better a late repentance and partial atonement than none at all!" said Lord Tressilian. "You have been sinful and wicked, but you can restore peace to a household to which you have assisted to bring grief; you can raise an almost dying man to renewed life and hope; and you can fill several hearts with gladness. This is the errand on which I have sought you everywhere, and which I now deliver to you, imploring you, as you wish for mercy in the

world you are about to enter, to show mercy here!"

"How?"

Lord Tressilian drew nearer the dying man, and said, in the same earnest, solemn tones.—

"Shawcross, you are one of three conspirators against Sir Allyn Dare. Therwell is one, and Headley is the second. Sir Allyn is accused of an impossible crime, which you pretend to have witnessed. I implore you to make a full confession of the truth. Do not carry this secret into eternity with you!"

Shawcross listened in a violent fit of trembling, his face growing more and more ghastly.

"I cannot tell," he muttered.

"Father, for my sake!" pleaded Nelly, bending her tearful face nearer to that of her parent. "Do not die with a guilty secret on your soul. Have mercy upon poor Miss Dare and her father. Surely, if you do Sir Allyn justice, the good deed will be set down to your credit above?"

"Do you think so?" asked Shawcross, eagerly, of Lord Tressilian.

The young Viscount, not knowing how else to reply, and devoutly hoping that Nelly's pious wish might have touched upon the truth, bowed in silence.

"I'll see then. Perhaps I won't die. I'll hear what the doctor says first!"

To this decision Shawcross adhered. No persuasions could induce him to make a confession until the arrival of the physician, and Lord Tressilian and Hugh finally left him to himself walking up and down the hall, arm in arm, in close conversation. Lady Chellis took up her post at the head of the improvised couch, Nelly knelt beside it and whispered to her father of the mercy extended to repentant sinners.

Half an hour passed, and then the doctor and magistrate arrived together. The death-damps were already gathering upon the brow of Shawcross, and it needed no experienced eye to tell that his hours were numbered. The physician looked at him, made a few inquiries, then gravely shook his head, and turned away.

No word was needed to tell Shawcross of his fate.

"Strange affair this, Sir Hugh!" said the magistrate, who had been one of the neighbours to welcome the baronet and his bride on their return upon the previous night. "Everything strange seems to be happening now-a-days. First Lady Chellis abducted, and then it comes out that she was never insane. Then this burglar gets killed. And this afternoon a strange mystery was revealed to me. A man named Therwell, who was secretary to the late Sir Allyn Dare, and who has been engaged to marry Miss Dare, appeared before me and declared that the present baronet had poisoned his own father! An incredible story. He says he has witnesses, and one of them is an innkeeper whom Sir Allyn has paid handsomely to keep the secret. Therwell wanted Sir Allyn apprehended, and when I refused to do so, he threatened to go to town about it."

"What did you do?"

"I've sent a couple of constables over to apprehend Sir Allyn," said the magistrate, gloomily. "Of course the baronet can clear himself. The charge is preposterous. But, on the evidence offered, though I held out a long time, I was obliged at last to arrest him."

Shawcross had listened to this low-toned conversation, every word of which had been understood by him. Now he raised one hand feebly and beckoned the magistrate nearer.

"Sir Allyn is innocent," he said, in a failing voice. "I am the third witness against him. I never thought that Therwell would go so far. I am ready to confess everything!"

Nelly kissed him approvingly, and Lord Tressilian pressed his hand in gratitude.

Paper and ink were brought and the magistrate took his seat at the bedside to receive the dying deposition of Shawcross.

He told his story feebly, and in brief, terse sentences, compelled by his waning strength to say what he had to say in as few words as possible. He knew that he was dying, and his heart shrank at the last from carrying with him into the other world a secret upon which depended a human life. It was all told at last and written out. The magistrate then read the confession aloud, and Shawcross, with some difficulty, from the tremulousness of his fingers, signed his name. The witnesses then appended their signatures.

"I feel happier already," said the dying man, as his hand fell to his side. "One of my sins is atoned for as it can be. Oh, if this one good deed at last might outweigh my many sins."

Nelly whispered words of comfort to him.

Sir Hugh beckoned to his young wife, and whispered to her as she joined him,—

"The carriage is ready, my love. We are to set out directly for Edencourt, which we hope to reach in time to save Sir Allyn and his daughter from any serious annoyance. Your presence may be of comfort to Miss Dare. Will you go?"

Lady Chellis assented and hastened to throw round her a shawl and to tie on her bonnet. She was conducted to the carriage by her husband, Lord Tressilian and the magistrate following them, taking their seats opposite. The little party then, with joyful hearts, drove quickly towards Edencourt, impatient to impart the glorious tidings gained by Shawcross's confession.

CHAPTER XL.

When the clouds have poured their rain
Sweeter smell the flowers;
Brighest shine heaven's starry train
In earth's sunless hours.

Tribulation—patience works
Hope from whence we borrow;
Such the hidden good that lurks
In dark days of sorrow.

Bernard Barton.

The hours succeeding the departure of Therwell upon his mission of revenge passed drearily enough to Sir Allyn Dare and his daughter. Each was anxious to encourage and inspirit the other, but their hearts were heavy with dread and foreboding. Ilde assured her father, with some faith in her own words, that no magistrate could be found who would for a moment consider any charge against him, and, as the day passed and they remained unmolested, Sir Allyn began to hope that he should be spared the humiliation of arrest and the disgrace of a public trial for murder.

Ilde did not leave her father during the day, even to change her attire. As he complained of being cold, she caused a fire to be kindled in the state drawing-room, and he sat near it all the day, seldom stirring except to accompany his family to the dining-room But he did not relapse into his former nervousness and despair. Quiet and self-possessed, he yet fully comprehended his situation, and at last dared to look his difficulties bravely in the face. The weakness of years had been thrown aside for ever.

Kate Arsdale and Mrs. Amry, whose revelations had wrought such a change in Ilde's prospects, and who was now regarded as a true friend, remained with the baronet and his daughter, striving, by a kind of forced cheerfulness, to dissipate the gloom that hung heavily over both.

Thus the day passed, and evening came.

The lamps were lighted in the pendant chandeliers, shedding forth a flood of radiance; the great bay-window was shut off from the main apartment by thick curtains of brocaded silk; the fire behind the glittering bars of the grate burned cheerily, adding a little to the heat that came in through invisible tubes, and giving an air of comfort that can never be attained by a hidden fire.

"May we not hope at last, papa?" asked Ilde, bending over Sir Allyn's chair and caressing his thin, pale brow shaded by snow-white locks.

The baronet smiled faintly, but shook his head.

"We must be prepared for the worst," he said.

There was a long silence, during which the baronet gazed thoughtfully into the fire and Ilde leaned against his chair, while at a little distance Kate Arsdale and Mrs. Amry appeared equally lost in abstraction.

The silence was broken at length by the ringing of horses hoofs upon the gravelled avenue, and soon after Vincent Therwell entered, accompanied by two constables.

"Did you think I had forgotten you?" asked the former, mockingly. "I could not resist the impulse to return with these men, and see how you and your daughter took your change of fortune."

One of the constables uttered a low reproof for this unseemly exultation over the fallen baronet, and then, as the latter arose and stood erect, his arms folded on his breast, he read aloud the warrant of arrest.

"I shall make no resistance," said Sir Allyn, quietly.

"I shall go with him," declared Ilde, resolutely, a scarlet flush kindling upon her pale cheeks. "You will not separate us?"

The constable informed her that he had no authority to take her; that her request was unprecedented, and that a jail was not a fit lodging for one so delicately nurtured as the daughter of Sir Allyn Dare. Quietly setting aside his objections, and the expostulations of her father, the young girl ordered a shawl and bonnet to be brought to her, and declared her place to be at her father's side, asserting that he was not well enough to bear the removal and anxiety alone.

"If Sir Allyn Dare be ill, that makes a difference," said the chief constable, compassionately, losing all faith in the monstrous charge against the baronet as he marked the calm demeanour of the latter and the ill-concealed exultation of Therwell. "We could wait until he feels better, but we must not lose sight of him!"

Therwell protested against any delay but his words were unheeded.

The two constables were willing to oversteр the boundaries of strict duty to comfort the stricken father and daughter, and Ilde thanked them with a grateful smile that more than repaid them for their unusual kindness.

To prolong their stay as much as possible, she ordered them to be served with ale and simple refreshments, of which they partook with a hearty relish, despite the angry remonstrance of Sir Allyn's accuser.

A little time was thus gained for consultation between the baronet and his daughter. They were in the midst of a discussion about counsel when carriage wheels were heard coming up the broad avenue, and both started, as if apprehensive of another blow.

The new arrival was that of the party from Monrepos.

They were ushered into the drawing-room, Lord Tressilian foremost, eager to cheer the heart of Ilde, the magistrate next, anxious to prevent annoyance to Sir Allyn from the constables, and, lastly, Sir Hugh and Lady Chellis, equally eager to supplant the present sorrow of Sir Allyn Dare and Ilde with a pure and lasting joy.

Ilde uttered a joyful exclamation, and permitted her lover to clasp her in his arms, unconscious that Therwell was scowling darkly upon their embrace.

The magistrate advanced to Sir Allyn, shook his hand warmly, and said,—

"You must forgive me, my old friend, for sending that warrant. It was, in a manner, forced from me. I never for an instant really

believed you guilty, but things did look suspicious, and I should have been blamed if I had passed over the evidence unnoticed."

"You are forgiven," said Sir Allyn wonderingly.

"Hilon, give me the warrant," said the magistrate."

The constable in some surprise, handed over the document, and the magistrate quietly laid it upon the fire.

"There," he said; "you need apprehend no more annoyance, Sir Allyn. Can you bear good news? Shawoross lies at the point of death, and has made a full confession of the conspiracy against you."

The baronet, faint and almost overcome, sank into his chair speechless with joy. Ilde flew to him and wept and laughed in her delight. Therwell muttered a curse, and attempted to glide from the room, but at a signal from the magistrate, the constables, who had kept a watch upon him, intercepted his movements and detained him prisoner.

"I can hardly believe it," said Sir Allyn, as soon as he could command his voice. "Shawoross has confessed? You are not deceiving me, I hope?"

"I will read the confession," said the magistrate. "It was made but a few minutes since, and at this moment Shawoross may be dead. Listen!"

He took from his pocket the confession, to the truth of which the dying Shawoross had sworn, stood under the chandelier, and proceeded to read as follows,—

"I, Holton Shawoross, am dying. With my last breath I desire to do justice to an innocent man who has been accused of an an awful crime. Ten years ago, in the course of my professional duties, I was called upon to act as nurse to the late Sir Allyn Dare, father of the present baronet of the same name. The present baronet, then Mr. Allyn Dare, was a wild young man, with a great many debts. His father was a severe old gentleman who allowed his son a certain allowance, and utterly refused to pay his debts or increase the allowance when he went beyond it. These facts I learned before I had been in the house twenty-four hours. I also discovered that Vincent Therwell, the late baronet's secretary, had established a strong influence over his employer, but that no one else liked him. Mr. Allyn especially detested him, and Therwell hated Mr. Allyn.

"I had been at Edencourt several weeks, during which time I had learned a great deal more about the family. Sir Allyn took opium every day, and this habit greatly aggravated his malady. He kept the fact secret, his valet, Hoadley, procuring the drug for him. Therwell knew it, and so did I, but the physician and Mr. Allyn did not suspect it.

"One afternoon—it was the twenty-second of April, and a dreary, rainy day—I had been waiting upon the invalid as usual, Hoadley, the valet, was with me. Sir Allyn had apparently fallen asleep, and Hoadley and I sat down in the shadow of the curtain at one side of the bed. We were almost hidden from observation. Therwell came in, and his coming awakened the baronet. Therwell went up to him and told him a long story about Mr. Allyn's extravagancies, and hinted that Mr. Allyn had told him that he wished his father dead. Sir Allyn was dreadfully enraged."

"He sent for his son directly. There was a fearful scene between father and son. Mr. Allyn denied what Therwell had said, but Sir Allyn refused to believe him. He ordered his son to take his wife and child and leave the house within the hour. Mr. Allyn declared he would not go.

The baronet wore himself out with his fury at last. He called me to give him a composing draught the doctor had left for him. I got up, trembling and frightened, and went to the bed. Mr. Allyn was standing beside it, and behind him was Therwell. There were two bottles on the medicine-stand, one with the composing draught, the other with the laudanum.

"I was bewildered. I never meant to do it. So surely as I live, I did not mean to take the wrong bottle. But I did. I poured out a draught of the laudanum and brought it to the baronet. He was too excited to notice the difference, the colour being the same.

"He took the poison and fell asleep. Mr. Allyn watched him awhile, his anger vanishing when he saw how pale and cold his father looked. Then he knelt down beside him, hid his face in the blankets and cried.

"Therwell looked at the blanket, smelled the glass into which I had poured the medicine, then came and whispered to Hoadley and me. He said that Sir Allyn was dead and that I had killed him. He said he hated Mr. Allyn and wanted revenge. He promised Hoadley and me money if he would say that Mr. Allyn had poisoned his father. I was afraid and I agreed to do so. Hoadley wanted money, and he also agreed.

"Sir Allyn never woke. When his son got off his knees he saw that his father was dead. Then Therwell stepped up to him, while he was stupefied, and accused him of poisoning the old gentleman. And Hoadley and I said we had seen him put something into the glass, not suspecting it was poison. The poor young man was horrified. He declared his innocence. But we were three against one.

"Mr. Allyn had a proud, sweet young wife, and a lovely little daughter. He could not bring shame upon them. He hadn't a great deal of courage. He saw three of us ready to swear away his life. The doctors could prove his father died by poison. He knew not what to do. And so, to keep us silent and to preserve his honour, he signed a compact that Therwell drew up, and Hoadley and I were the witnesses.

"Besides all these reasons, Mr. Allyn had another that would have told against him. In his anger at his father's unreasonableness, he had made serious threats that would have convinced many of his guilt.

"The end was—he signed the compact. Afterwards, he gave me money, and I went away from Edenville, for I couldn't bear to see his face after I had wronged him. He is innocent, I swear it, with my dying breath. And the guilt, if guilt there was, was mine. I also declare that Vincent Therwell and William Hoadley forced me into this conspiracy against the present Sir Allyn Dare under the penalty of giving me up on a charge of murder."

That was all, except the signature. But it was enough to lift a terrible weight of woe from the poor weak baronet's heart: enough to thrill Ide's soul with a sweeter and more intense happiness than she had ever felt; enough to inspire Lord Tressilian with tender pity for the wronged Sir Allyn; and enough to take away for ever the cloud from the house of Dare.

The party thronged about the baronet, overwhelming him with their congratulations. For some moments a miniature babel reigned. But when the confusion had subsided the magistrate said,—

"It may be some comfort to you Sir Allyn, to punish your enemy as he deserves. He can be indicted for conspiracy——"

"No interrupted the baronet, his gentle face altogether transfigured by his happiness, "I do not wish to make this unhappy affair public. I am free at last, and will leave his punishment to an avenging heaven. Let him go!"

Therwell was expelled with ignominy from the mansion of which he had expected on the morrow to be the master.

Then Sir Allyn turned to Lady Chellis and thanked her anew for her efficient assistance in his darkest hour. He next took the hand of Lord Tressilian, and said,—

'Gay, it is to you that I owe this confession of Shawoross. If you had not pursued him and tracked him to Monrepos, I should have slept to-night in a felon's cell. I cannot find words to thank you sufficiently. But this shall be your reward!"

He took one hand of the blushing Ilde and laid it in that of Lord Tressilian.

The gift thus bestowed was ratified a few weeks later in the little church of Edenville by the good clergyman who had known her from her infancy. The young couple were married on a lovely sun-lit morning, and never did a fairer bride wear an orange-wreath than Ilde Dare, nor a prouder handsomer bridegroom kneel before the altar than Lord Tressilian.

That sunny bridal morning bade fair to become the emblem of their united lives.

Sir Allyn Dare has recovered his strength and has gained new vigour. He has taken his place again in the world among men of his age and position, and his children are growing prouder of him every day. The shadows of the past are all dissipated, and he looks at life now with unclouded gaze, and wonders sometimes at his past weakness and follies.

Kate Arsdale has left Edencourt for a home of her own, but Ilde still cherishes her as a sister.

Mrs. Amry has a pleasant home at Edencourt, where she expects always to remain. Her daughter, Annie Therwell, died in the asylum, breathing out her life gently, and never awakening to a remembrance of her past sufferings.

Sir Hugh and Lady Chellis, whose destiny had been so strangely interwoven at the last with that of the Dares, concluded, from their increasing happiness, that their marriage had been the result of a divine and blessed Providence. Miss Dorothy, who still lives, and still delights in caustic speeches, coincides with them in this opinion, and has finally made her will in her grand-nephew's favour, leaving the heathen natives of Africa to flourish in their original costumes. She resides with Sir Hugh and Adah, part of the time at Hawks Nest, and the rest of the time at Monrepos, and continues as keen and sharp-sighted as on the occasion of her memorable interview with Mr. Wilmer.

Of that unhappy man nothing but what we have recorded is positively known. A tall, thin gentleman, corresponding in every particular to his description, was afterwards seen abroad, in company with his wife, a person resembling Mrs. Barrat. This gentleman, at a foreign watering-place, had a quarrel, and, afterwards, a desperate encounter, with a stout, short-statured man, in which the latter was instantly killed, and the former mortally wounded.

The stout man's name was ascertained to be Vincent Therwell. His opponent was supposed to be Adah's false guardian, Mr. Wilmer.

In the possession of unalloyed happiness we leave the Tressilians and the Chellises. There is a firm friendship between the two families, which is deeper than that which usually subsists between relatives, because founded upon a tie stronger than that of blood. And the sun of happiness which shines upon one family shines equally upon the other. Through the portal of a mysterious marriage with an unknown bride Sir Hugh has entered upon a life of noble aims and splendid prosperity; and through many sorrows and terrors Ilde Dare has found the sweetest rest, and peace in the sheltering and adoring love of her young husband.

[THE END.]

Custom ordains certain cakes called poppladies to be eaten at St. Albans upon New Year's Day. The poplady is very similar to the hot cross bun, but in shape it is long and narrow, being intended presumably to represent the human figure, to which end it is ornamented with a couple of currants to represent eyes, with another one lower down to mark the mouth. Who and what the original poplady was, and why she is eaten in effigy upon the first day of the year are questions which still await answers.

No animal has more than five toes, digits or claws to each foot or limb. The horse is one-toed, the ox two-toed, the rhinoceros is three-toed, the hippopotamus is four toed, and the elephant and hundreds of other animals are five-toed.

The oddest notions seem to be entertained about the arrangements which are made for the Queen's journeys. It is true that they are minute and elaborate, but they do not involve the employment of 20,000 men along the line of route to Scotland as some people imagine. It may interest some of our readers to know that the principal details which are invariably insisted upon:—A pilot engine carrying a guard, and provided in foggy weather with hand and fog signals, travels along the whole route exactly ten minutes in advance of the Royal train; both the pilot engine and the Royal train are worked under the strict block system, and the line is kept absolutely clear of all obstructions for fifteen minutes before the passing of the pilot, and goods trains must be shunted thirty minutes before the passing of the pilot; no train, except passenger trains, are allowed to travel along the opposite line to the Royal train within fifteen minutes of its being due; the danger signals are kept on at all stations after the Royal train has passed, and no train or engine is allowed to proceed until the Royal train has been signalled as clear of the next station in advance; station masters, superintendents, pointsmen, gatesmen, platelayers, and gangers are all ordered to their posts and held personally responsible for details during the journey, and telegraph clerks at all stations on the route have to be at their instruments fifteen mintes before the starting of the Royal train, and are not allowed to leave on any pretence whatever until the journey is completed. It will be seen by this that an accident to a Royal train is, humanly speaking, impossible; yet with the exception of certain arrangements in connection with the clearing of the line, there is little that is not done habitually for ordinary passengers when the block system is properly carried out.

In the matter of courtships and weddings Scottish people preserve an extraordinary number of peculiar customs and fanciful superstitions. It is deemed unlucky to alter the first width of an engagement ring. Many troths have been broken as a result. The giving of brooches and pins by lovers is full of ill consequences. No young man or woman, in the tender relation, will take a pin from the other without returning the same after use. Pins, needles, etc., are all emblematic of the cessation of friendship and affection. It is very fortunate for the bride to wear some borrowed article of apparel at her wedding. If swine cross the path of the bridal party before it, it is an omen of the direst import; but if they should cross its path behind the party, it would be a happy augury. A wedding after sunset entails on the bride a joyless life, the loss of children, and an early grave. In the south of Scotland a rainy day for a marriage is an unlucky one. The bride is then called "a greetin bride;" whereas, "Blest is the bride that the sun shines on." To "rub shoulders" with the bride is a sign of speedy marriage; the first among the unmarried female friends who succeeds in doing it will be the first to wed; and I have myself witnessed scrambles on the part of buxom Scotch lasses for precedence quite closely approaching fisticuffs. As a newly married wife first enters her new home some elderly person must throw a cake of shortbread into the door before her. One securing a piece of cheese cut with the bride's own hand before she has left the wedding feast, is certain to be shortly happily married. And it is everywhere in Scotland as inauspicious for the bride's mother to be present at a wedding as it is unfortunate in our country to have the same individual arrive, to remain, at any subsequent period.

CONSTANCE CAREW.

CHAPTER XXV.

"ALFRED, WE MEET AGAIN!"

On entering Kilworthy House, Eric Balderson's first question is concerning Sir Wilfred Marshall.

"He's better, sir; but he isn't out of danger," the servant replies, in a low tone. "The doctors have been with him again since you went out."

"Thank you," he replies, and then goes direct to the room, where Constance and her father are expecting him.

Our heroine, who is by far the more anxious of the two, is working industriously upon that afternoon tea-cloth, into which seems to have been woven in cross-stitch the story of all her grief.

Nobody but herself could read that story in the flowers and leaves that adorn it, but Constance could tell you that that flower was worked on the first evening Sir Wilfred spent with her father and herself after her return from school; this one on another occasion, and so on through the brief chapter of this portion of her life's history.

This evening she could not read, for her mind is too distracted to be able to fix is upon any subject, beyond her own anxiety and experience, for any length of time.

Neither she nor her father are inclined to talk much, and so she has taken up this work again, perhaps because it is so distasteful to her.

She glances up with a question in her eyes as the artist enters the room, and he, full of his last discovery, says, eagerly,—

"I have just spoken to Alfred Rendlemere, the man who sprang out of the train, the same whom that villainous lawyer accused you of murdering!" he adds, addressing Constance.

"Where, where?" she asks, excitedly.

"At your gate; but he has escaped me. He darted away when I addressed him by name," he replies, and then he repeats what actually passed between them.

"I am sorry you could not detain him," says Constance; "his anxiety about Sir Wilfred shows that he feels some gratitude towards him; but the police ought to be communicated with. He may leave Teignmouth to-night."

"He has done nothing to warrent us in calling in the aid of the police," says Eric, gravely. "He may have hidden himself from his friends, but that is his business and theirs, not ours; besides, he is sure to be found again soon. Perhaps now he has been recognised he may throw off this disguise of his own accord. In any case, provided we can prove that he is alive, what he does or fails to do does not concern us."

"I quite agree with you," exclaims Captain Carew, warmly. "It was his mysterious disappearance, coupled with other circumstances that has created all the bother, and he ought to be made to see the error of his ways. But that he should run away from that Margaret Saunderson I can quite understand. I should have done the same had I been in his place."

"Margaret is a very sweet and gentle girl, though I am afraid she has been prejudiced against me," says Constance, rising and about to leave the room. Then she asks, timidly, "Would there be any harm in my sending round to tell her that you have seen him, Mr. Balderson?"

"I don't think I would do so to-night," he replies, and Captain Carew says, emphatically,—

"Don't do anything of the kind. It is past ten, I'm sure Balderson is hungry, let us have a bit of supper, just order it yourself please, dear."

And as his daughter goes to obey his orders, he asks, nervously,—

"Have you seen the Treleavens, Mrs. I mean?"

"Yes, I have just come from her house," is the reply.

"What did she say? Did she ask for me?" questions the Captain, eagerly.

"No, I don't think your name was mentioned," says Balderson, carelessly. "I hadn't an opportunity of saying anything about you because there was company, but I said I would call in the morning to see her."

"Company!" echoes Captain Carew. "Who was there?"

"Myra Barlow and a solicitor named Wharton, who seems very anxious to step into your shoes, so I don't think you will have any difficulty in vacating them."

"A common, vulgar fellow!" cries the Captain, disdainfully. "He only wants to marry the widow for her money!"

"I am afraid she wouldn't have many suitors if she were poor," returns the artist, drily, and his companion turns away conscious that there is much truth in his observation, though he does not like to admit it.

Fortunately the supper tray is brought in at this moment. Constance returns, and conversation becomes general, the condition of the wounded Baronet giving them all cause for anxiety.

The doctors had given such confident hopes of his recovery when the bullet was successfully extracted, then came a relapse, and now, though the fever has slightly abated, Constance is so anxious about him, that now and again the tears unbidden come into her eyes.

Presently, Captain Carew leaves the room, and Eric Balderson, who has finished his light repast, remarks significantly,—

"I have seen your enemy."

"Ah! what did he say?" she asks, feverishly.

He tells her briefly as possible, and she, unnerved as she has been by the exciting events of the day, clasps her hands tightly, and says fearfully,—

"I am afraid of that man! He will do Sir Wilfred or me some dreadful mischief before it is all over!"

"He will no doubt if he has the chance," assents the artist, "and the difficulty before me is that, although I haven't the least doubt that it was he who shot Sir Wilfred, I don't see how I can prove it until our friend can himself speak. Hark! What noise is that?"

"Papa and Myra quarrelling!" cries Constance, recognising the voices. "Oh, this is too bad!"

She moves towards the door as she speaks, but the artist is before her, and in a few seconds he returns, bringing the Captain and Myra both with him.

"Papa, have you forgotten who is ill in the house?" asks Constance, reproachfully.

"I had forgotten for the moment," replies her father, penitently; "but I cannot and will not continue to be insulted by this girl!" pointing indignantly at Myra.

"I haven't insulted you, but I'm not going to be dictated to!" retorts that young person defiantly. "Flying at me for being out late, when it's only just eleven o'clock."

"I requested you to leave the house nearly a week ago!" cries Captain Carew, "and you are still here!"

"Yes, 'twas very rude to tell me to go!" answers Myra, insolently, "and I'm going soon, when its convenient—I wish I knew where."

This last *sotto voce*.

She is a handsome, impudent-looking little minx to-night.

Her cheeks are flushed, her eyes are bright, her lips are red, and she is savagely, though unconsciously, pulling threads of silk out of the sash of the frock she wears.

Other girls, in similar circumstances, would be meek and humble, for to-night she has been doubly defeated. She has tried hard to get an invitation from the Treleavens to transfer herself from Kilworthy House to their abode, and has completely failed

On her way home, accompanied by James Trealeaven, she has tried without success to turn the young man's professed admiration into something like a proposal for an immediate marriage.

But here again she has not succeeded, partly because he is not in a position to maintain a wife who has no money of her own, but principally, it must be admitted, on account of her extreme youth, and he had talked about an engagement of three or four years duration, until Myra lost her temper and left him at the gate, without so much as saying good-night.

It was in this frame of mind that she met Captain Carew's rebuke about staying out so late at night, and here she stands rebellious and defiant, pulling her sash to pieces, determined not to apologise or to eat one crumb of humble pie, but, with this exception, not knowing whither to go or what to do.

Constance feels quite unequal to cope with her. She knows Myra of old, knows how reckless of consequences she is when these fits of ill-humour are upon her, and she is now only anxious to get away from her and to avoid anything that can prolong the quarrel.

So she takes her father's arm and speaks to him in a low tone, tries to lead him from the room, and probably would not succeed, if Eric Balderson did not say, persuasively,—

"You'd better leave her to me; I'll settle this matter."

And thus persuaded, Captain Carew allows himself to be led away by his daughter.

Myra remains master of the field, yet hers is but a barren victory.

Her quick ears have detected that they were all talking together in low tones, though she could not distinguish the words they uttered.

At the sound of the gentle closing of the door, however, she turns round sharply, perceives that she and the artist are alone, and though she quails a little under the disapproving glance of his brilliant eyes, she throws off a certain amount of restraint, having known him as she has for several years, and asks coolly, almost insolently,—

"Well, what are you going to say to me?"

"That you must leave this house to-morrow," he answers, firmly.

"Oh, I don't want to stay if I know where to go," she retorts, flinging herself upon a chair and beginning to admire the toes of her shoes. "It's deadly-lively here, goodness knows. I should think a hospital would be a jolly place compared with this house."

Eric shrugs his shoulders. Her bravado is beneath his notice, but he says, quietly,—

"You know what your Aunt Caroline wrote to you. She wishes you to go back at once to Denborough House as articled pupil. You can make all your preparations to-night. I will telegraph in the morning the time at which you will arrive in town, and will see you off myself."

"It's awfully condescending of you, but I don't chose to leave Teignmouth just at present," she says, disdainfully, kicking a hassock with her toes and seeming much more interested in this performance than in what he is saying to her.

"Very well," he resumes, unruffled by her insolence, "there is another alternative open to you. Miss Culver wishes to leave her situation at once; the lady whose governess she is cannot find a substitute immediately, and she would probably take you for the time being if you apply to her in the morning."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" is her more emphatic than ladylike exclamation, and she jumps from her chair and stamps her foot passionately. "That kind of thing may suit Miss Culver, it won't suit me."

"I don't suppose that anybody would engage your services except on an emergency who had once had Miss Culver," replies Eric Balderson, so carelessly that it stings Myra into saying,—

"Ah! Edith Culver hasn't looked adoringly at you in vain; and she is going to study art, too, and you are going to help her, of course? I hope you'll ask me to the wedding," with a spiteful little laugh.

"Our wedding will be much too modest to be graced by your presence, Myra," returns the artist, with quiet scorn. "But your affairs, not mine, are what we are discussing to-night; and I tell you frankly that unless you decide by the morning to take either of the two courses I have suggested to you I shall telegraph to your Aunt Mary to fetch you at once. You have trespassed far too long upon Captain Carew's hospitality, and you must leave this house to-morrow, go where you will."

Myra so far forgets her affectation of being grown up as to make a grimace at Balderson when he passes, a foolish, childish action which might provoke his mirth if he did not feel so thoroughly annoyed with her.

He is vexed a little with himself, too, for he does not yet know if he shall ask Edith Culver to become his wife, and he has been provoked into speaking of "our marriage" as if it were already a settled thing.

"You had better come to some decision by the morning," he remarks, coolly; then he takes up a book and does not observe how Myra leaves the room with her nose high in the air, as though she would thus show her contempt for him.

But a change comes over Myra's spirits before the morning dawns. Nobody knows better than herself how completely dependent she is upon the goodwill of the very people whom she has been unwise enough to defy; and thus it is that when Constance Carew starts immediately after breakfast to see Margaret Saunderson she is the bearer of a message to the effect that Myra is willing to fill Edith Culver's place if Mrs. Ralstone will accept her as a substitute.

When Constance makes this tardy visit she is full of affection and sympathy for her former schoolfellow, and she is therefore a little chilled by the manner in which Margaret receives her.

Our heroine, however, has come with a purpose. The time she intends to stay here is short, and unheeding the chilliness of her reception. She dashes into her subject at once by saying,—

"I wanted to send to you last night, but they told me it was too late, Mr. Rendlemere is, or was, last night, in Teignmouth, Mr. Balderson spoke with him at our gate."

"Alfred alive, and near me!" cries Margaret, starting to her feet, clasping her hands, and standing like one transfixed, then with a sob, she asks reproachfully,—

"Why is he not here with me? Why did you not send?"

"We could not bring him, he darted away directly he was recognised," replies Constance, gravely.

"Oh he must be mad! mad!" groans Margaret, sadly.

The sufferings of the last few weeks, have changed her greatly, though she is still pretty and gentle, and Constance ventures to say with tender sympathy,—

"Yes, I am afraid he is mad, dear, it is a mercy you found it out before you married him."

Margaret frowns, angrily, then she says emphatically,—

"I don't agree with you, nothing can be a mercy that takes him from me."

Constance is silent. What can she say after such a sentiment as this.

Presently she asks abruptly,—

"What became of him in the tunnel, you know, I'm sure you do?"

"I will tell you all I know," replies our heroine, kindly, and she does so, adding the few words which Sir Wilfred Marshall had told her, about his having saved the man's life, and of the promise of secrecy which he had given.

"I cannot give you any details of how he was rescued," Constance continues, "Sir Wilfred wanted to find Mr. Rendlemere, and get his permission to tell me, but you know he was shot as he left the house, and he has not been able to speak to any of us since."

"He mustn't publish the details, we must keep it secret that he tried to take his own life," cries Margaret, quickly. "He wasn't responsible for his actions at the time; it was that sunstroke. Who knows that he tried to commit suicide besides you and Sir Wilfred and I?"

"Only Mr. Balderson," replies Constance.

"I told him yesterday, so that he might understand all, and help me to set things straight for others, if not for myself."

"Ah! how is Sir Wilfred? I had forgotten to ask," inquires Margaret.

"He is alive," is the answer, uttered with a deep sigh. "More, I dare not say with certainty; after the operation I thought he would get well directly, but afterwards he grew worse. I can't stay much longer, though I am not allowed to nurse him, I don't like to be out of the house."

At this moment, Eric Balderson who had accompanied Constance to the door of the house, and had been passing the time by strolling along the street, now enters the sitting-room abruptly and without apology exclaims,—

"Miss Sanderson, put on your hat at once and come with me quickly, you haven't a minute to spare, you also Miss Carew. Take way, but don't appear to take any particular notice of anybody till I gave you a sign."

Without asking a question they obey, and they have walked a short distance, when Balderson directs their attention to a man, dressed as a labourer, who is standing before a stationer's shop by the door of which are posters, newspapers, and periodicals.

"That is the man I want you to observe," says the artist to Margaret. "We will stand round him so that he must face us."

Margaret's face is very pale, her heart beats quickly, but she does not utter a word until the man turns round carelessly about to walk away.

In doing so he recognises Constance, and to avoid her gaze takes a step in another direction, to be met by Margaret Saunderson, who says, faintly,—

"Alfred, we meet again!"

For a moment he hesitates, doubtful whether to fly or to face the situation, then with the ease of a well-bred gentleman, he takes her hand, and and says, gently,—

"I had no idea that you were in this place."

"Otherwise he would have taken himself elsewhere," remarks Balderson, in a low tone to Constance; "but here is Miss Culver coming up the street, let us go and meet her."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SILVER LINING.

"You are early this morning," remarks Edith Culver, with momentary jealousy, as she greets the handsome couple, who advance to meet her.

"Yes, I have been to see Margaret Saunderson," replies Constance, calmly, "and I am anxious to return home as quickly as possible.

Edith glances past the speaker, perceives the odd couple walking slowly down the street, and she asks, curiously,—

"Who is that strange-looking man talking to Maggie?"

"Can't you guess?" asks our heroine, in such a tone that Edith exclaims, quickly,—

"How wonderful! She has recognised him! He spoke to me the other day, and I wondered at a man with such a face wearing such clothes; but my mind was too much occupied with other matters to give much thought to him. I suppose that is really Alfred Rendlemere?"

"Yes, and I owe almost all that I have

suffered since I left school, to his eccentricity," replies Constance, sadly.

She is thinking of Sir Wilfred Marshall as she speaks, and is wondering if his precious life is to be one of the forfeits for this man's folly.

"Good may come out of evil," remarks Balderson, thoughtfully, "and some of us might never have known the good stuff of which others were made, but for this trial. Don't you think I am right, Miss Culver?"

"Perhaps you are," she assents, "but I am scarcely in a condition to give an opinion upon any subject, I am so greatly upset this morning."

"Ah! that reminds me that we have a message for you from Myra Barlow," says Constance, quickly; "but, Mr. Balderson, you will tell Edith all about it, won't you? I want to get home as quickly as possible; I shall see both of you again to-day."

"We will take you to your door," says the artist.

"No, I would rather that you didn't; there is Mr. Catchbull, coming up the street, only keep him in sight so that he does not follow me."

"He shan't do that," replies Balderson, in quick, but emphatic tones; then, as Constance walks quickly away, he turns, rejoins Margaret Saunderson, and says significantly,—

"Here comes the lawyer who brought a charge of murder against Miss Carew; the least you can do now is to introduce him to your friend."

Margaret looks startled and nervous, while Rendlemere mutters something about wishing to change his clothes first, but Balderson is in no mood to be trifled with; for aught he can tell the man may again disappear, and he says, resolutely,—

"I will introduce him if you prefer it."

"No; I should like him to know that he is mistaken," Margaret replies with an appealing glance at the man whose erratic behaviour has caused her so much suffering.

He would escape from the introduction if he could, but Eric Balderson's brilliantly piercing eyes are upon him with magnetic power, and he knows that if he were to attempt to fly, the latter would speedily overtake and capture him.

So he stands still while Catchbull, rather wondering at the group, comes boldly on, determined to show the artist that he does not fear him. He is a little surprised therefore when Miss Saunderson steps forward and says,—

"Mr. Catchbull, I shall not have to trouble you any more; this is Mr. Alfred Rendlemere."

An expression of blank dismay comes over the lawyer's countenance: with this man's re-appearance the ground seems to be cut from under his feet; the terror which he held over the head of Constance has suddenly melted in his grasp, and he is dumbfounded for the moment, until he meets the eye of Eric Balderson, then he pulls himself together suddenly, and lifting an eye-glass which he wears out of affectation, rather than loss of sight, he surveys Alfred Rendlemere with a supercilious glance, and says, contemptuously,—

"I should never have expected to find a gentleman in those clothes!"

There is something so insulting in his voice and manner, that Rendlemere is about to resent it with his fists when Balderson says, soothingly,—

"Don't notice the barking of a beaten cur; besides, he may have another pistol about him. I disarmed him of one last night."

Catchbull hears what the artist says, but he walks away quickly without uttering another word; he is a beaten cur, he knows it, and since the tide has begun to turn, who can say that it will not overtake him, as he hastens to his office intending to shut himself in his own room and review the situation.

But here another disagreeable surprise awaits him. Mrs. Treleaven and Mr. Wharton are together waiting in the office, having come here to demand the delivery of certain securities belonging to the former of which he has managed to get possession.

He says, truly enough that the papers are not here, but promises to deliver them within a week, and the couple, disappointed though they are at the delay, leave him at length, and take the train for Exeter, where they intend to be secretly married.

Meanwhile Eric Balderson and Edith Culver having parted from Margaret and her singularly attired companion, walk down to the shore.

"I have only a few minutes to spare," says Edith, "but I must tell you something that troubles me. You spoke of a pistol just now?"

"Yes, that rascally lawyer would have given me the benefit of its contents if I had not taken it from him last night."

"Then he had two," cries the girl, nervously; "for I know where he has hidden the other."

And then he tells her companion how Catchbull, who is still staying in his sister's house, came home the same night, on which the cowardly attack was made upon Sir Wilfred Marshall, and how in the early dawn he crept up to the box-room.

"I only summoned courage this morning to find out what it was he had hidden," she continues. "Everything was locked but an empty portmanteau that had been in my room, that was closed only by a spring, and on opening it I found a revolver. I didn't dare to touch it, but I saw that the maker's name was 'Dobson.'"

"Then it is the fellow of the one I took from him," exclaims Balderson; "but are you quite sure that previous to that night the portmanteau was empty?"

"Quite sure," is the answer, "the housemaid could say the same. No doubt she believes it to be empty still."

"Your discovery will be valuable if Sir Wilfred dies, or if he did not recognise his assailant," remarks Balderson, for the present say nothing about it. And now, don't you think you had better leave your situation at once as Myra has consented to take your place?"

"I do, I shall be delighted to be free," is the answer, with such a sigh of relief that Eric can well understand how galling has been her thraldom.

"When you are free you will join your friend, Miss Saunderson, I suppose?" he asks, slowly.

"Yes, I have promised to do so for a time," she replies. "What our movements will be I cannot say, but directly I get to London I intend to work hard to prepare myself to be a student at the Royal Academy."

"I shouldn't be in a hurry to take any decided step in that direction," he says, musingly. "Indeed, I have something more personal to suggest to you. I tell you frankly I should wait for a more favourable occasion, when our minds were less full of the perplexities of our friends; but that impertinent little minx, Myra Barlow, provoked me into making a remark last night which she is pretty sure to repeat, and which you might consider a liberty if I did not first ask you, as I now do, to become my wife?"

He speaks so slowly that Edith could well believe he has learnt his lesson off by heart. There is nothing of the tender, passionate lover in his words or gaze; nay, he avoids looking at her as he speaks; and she, loving him so devotedly as she does, is for a moment tempted to accept his hand upon any terms. Then pride and self-respect comes to her rescue. To be his wife and to be conscious that he does not love her, would be worse than death; worse, far worse than living single for the rest of her days.

So, after that brief temptation, she steadies her voice and asks, timidly,—

"Do you ask me because of what you said to Myra, or because—because you love me?"

"Am I the man to ask such a question of any woman if I did not love her?" he asks, with such an intensity of feeling in his expressive eyes, that she breathes a deep sigh of happiness, and says, impulsively,—

"No, I don't believe that you would, and you know that I love you!"

"The knowledge makes me very happy," he replies reverently. "I pray Heaven that I may be worthy of a pure woman's love!"

Then he bends and kisses her, and thus they plight their troth.

* * * * *

Several things happen in the days which follow, and I can only briefly enumerate them.

The first of these is the flight and tragic fate of Mr. Leonard Catchbull. After the death of the senior partner he had had the affairs of the firm completely in his own hands, acting, as he was supposed to do, for the widow and her family as well as for himself.

Under these circumstances he was feathering his own nest very comfortably, when Mrs. Treleaven's demand for her securities, and subsequent marriage with a sharp lawyer convinced him that a settlement could not long be delayed.

The news that reached him a few days later to the effect that Sir Wilfred Marshall's recovery was certain, and that his assailants would soon be in the hands of the police, helped further to alarm him, though he did not decide upon flight until a warrant was issued for his apprehension.

Then he hastily gathered together not only his own property, but much belonging to other people, and having disguised himself started for Dartmouth, intending to take passage to the Cape in the *Dynover Castle*, which would sail on the morrow.

Without mishap he reaches Kingswear were the railway terminates, and as he does not desire to cross to Dartmouth in the ferry, he hires a boat to take him to the vessel which is moored near the mouth of the river.

A traitor who turns fugitive is always a coward, and Catchbull is so fearful of capture, that he looks behind him, rather than whither he is going, and through some mishap in climbing the side of the vessel, he looses his footing and falls into the river.

There are plenty of ready hands to help him, and no doubt he would be saved if he did not so tenaciously cling to a black bag which he has never allowed to leave his grasp.

When his dead body is brought to shore, half-an-hour afterwards, the bag is still locked in his arms, and on its being opened, certain property is found in it, the loss of which would have brought certain ruin to more than one family.

As it is, the firm of Treleaven Treleaven and Catchbull is so injured in its position and credit, that Myra Barlow decides that she will have nothing more to do with the foolish young man, who will now be its nominal head, so she provokes a quarrel with Mrs. Ralstone, and declaring she has been insulted, packs up her belongings and returns to Dunborough House, where she knows she will find a home, if not a welcome.

Thus we leave her, a girl with whom self-love is the ruling principle of life, can never rise above mediocrity, except it be through crime.

* * * * *

One scene more and my story ends.

Six weeks have elapsed since that morning, when Eric Balderson asked Edith Culver to become his wife, and Sir Wilfred Marshall and the artist, are walking arm in arm under the trees in Nuncombe Park, that stand by the side of the private chapel, which had once excited Myra Barlow's enthusiastic admiration.

The Baronet is still looking pale and weak, though it is a full month since the doctor consented to his removal from Kilworthy House.

All that nurses and doctors can do for him

["DO YOU ASK ME BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU SAID TO MYRA, OR BECAUSE YOU LOVE ME?" SAID EDITH CULVER.]

has been done, but although he is advised that a more bracing climate is necessary for his complete recovery, he has resolutely refused to seek it alone.

"If Constance will marry me, I will go wherever she likes to take me," he had said to Captain Carew, when he urged the necessity of following the unanimous advice of the doctors, and though the captain had made objections to this proposal, he speedily found himself in the minority, for Constance was quite willing, and Eric Balderson strongly advised the step.

So everything is arranged, quietly, almost secretly, and though the servants at Nutcombe Park know that their master will leave home this afternoon to be absent several months, and that he expects some friends to-day to luncheon with him, they do not know that he is to be married first by special licence, in his own private chapel, and that he is even now awaiting the bride with her father and the clergyman.

The grey-haired butler and portly housekeeper are therefore a little astonished when a carriage arrives containing a clergyman and Miss Edith Culver, who, on alighting, are met by Sir Wilfred and Mr. Balderson and lead at once to the chapel.

Their surprise is increased when a second carriage arrives containing Captain and Miss Carew, who are met by Mr. Balderson and likewise taken to the chapel whither the principle servants are now also summoned.

The bride, for such she is, wears an elegant travelling-dress of cornflower coloured velvet, with hat to match, and she looks exquisitely lovely as she stands by the side of her bridegroom and repeats the solemn words of the marriage service.

It is an impressive scene, the little chapel with its woodwork of carved cedar, its pillars of Devonshire marble, and all its windows of stained glass. The sunlight is streaming through the latter upon the small company within the building, and when the ceremony is over and Sir Wilfred and his bride come out into the broad daylight, they are almost dazzled by the wealth of colour upon the late autumn leaves, which glow with crimson and purple and orange now, but a few weeks hence will be no more.

It is a well-known fact that those who have least at stake are usually the most jovial members of a party.

So it is in the present instance. The clergyman who was a college friend of Sir Wilfred's is the one who, at the luncheon which follows, talks the most, and next to him is Captain Carew, whom nobody could seriously believe to have been jilted as the Treleavens choose to report.

The bride and bridegroom say but little, their feelings are too deep for words, and Edith and Eric are also more than usually silent; but then it is generally understood that they are to be married in London a fortnight hence, and after a brief honeymoon they are to join Sir Wilfred and his bride, who, after going north for a while, will meet the Balderson's in Paris, and travel with them from thence to Rome.

Breakfast is nearly over when Captain Carew, addressing Edith, remarks carelessly,—

"So your friend, Miss Saunderson was really mad enough to marry that fellow who gave us so much trouble, and led her such a dance?"

"Yes, she was married three days ago," replies Edith, with a smile. "I was her bridesmaid."

"A bridesmaid twice in one week," laughs the Captain. "You must take the leading character yourself next time. But what a fool that girl was. The man was mad as a hatter!"

"You called her mad just now," laughs Edith, "so they are both in one boat; but they are happy enough according to Maggie's letters, and that is everything."

"For the present, for the present," mutters the Captain.

Then, suddenly changing his tone, he says, dolefully,—

"I am afraid I shall feel wretchedly dull when you are all gone away. I got along comfortably enough while Constance was at school, but since then I have had so many people about me that the house will seem quite desolate."

"You had better take up your quarters here," remarks Sir Wilfred, promptly. "It will be a change for you and a kindness to us, because the place won't be left to servants as it otherwise must be."

"Not a bad idea," assents Captain Carew. "I will come."

Sir Wilfred smiles his thanks, while Constance blushes, and then a servant comes to announce that the carriage is at the door, and the bride and her father realise that the parting has come.

But the parting, though tender, is a brief one. A kiss, a grasp of the hand, and speedily afterwards the bride and bridegroom are being driven rapidly to Dawlish railway station, where a couple of servants are already waiting with their luggage.

Constance, on reaching the platform, glances round with a shiver, remembering how, after passing this station on her way from school, she seemed to have left all happiness and peace of mind behind her.

On going through that tunnel yonder, her careless girlhood departed; but all the mental agony she suffered then and afterwards only comes back to her memory now as a contrast to her present great and exceeding joy.

[THE END.]

THE silver of 20*s.* only costs the Mint 12*s.*

["IS ANYTHING THE MATTER?" ASKED NEIL, STOPPING THE MARE ABRUPTLY.]

NOVELETTE.]

BEDFORD HALL.

CHAPTER I.

WHY it was called "Bedford Hall" no one had any idea, seeing it was between fifty and a hundred miles away from the county of that name, and it had never received, and was never likely to receive, any patronage from the illustrious Duke of Bedford. Perhaps the enterprising proprietor had first seen the light in the town always connected in one's mind with John Bunyan, and wished to do honour to his native place; but no matter what the reason, when Peter Lambert, speculator and shrewd calculating man of the world, purchased the ancestral home of the Alwyns, his first step was to change the name of the rambling old mansion, from Alwyn Grange to Bedford Hall, and he confided to no one in the neighbourhood his reasons for this step.

Truth to say, the neighbourhood looked with ill-concealed displeasure on Mr. Lambert, and did not feel at all disposed to welcome him. The Alwyns had been a generous, open-handed race, no one's enemy but their own, and under their sway the Grange had been a delightful place to visit at. Reckless hospitality, boundless extravagance, had been the order of the day, and though some wiseacres prophesied a "smash must come of such goings on," for the most part people had been willing to forget the future in enjoyment of the present, and it came as a shock to the majority of his acquaintances when Sir Bryan Alwyn and his son joined together to cut off the entail, and the old place was sold—far below its value in the general opinion—to Peter Lambert, the purchase-money defraying the Baronet's debts to the uttermost farthing, and leaving a slender—a very slender—balance to support the father and son until the former was gathered to his last home, and the latter had carved out a position for himself.

That was the charm of the Alwyn's disappearance. That was why their memory lingered so pleasantly in people's minds. There had been no leave-taking, no visits of condolence, equally painful to pay and to receive. Sir Bryan went up to town at the close of the shooting season, without a special good-bye to anyone, without a hint he should never return. Denzil joined him a week later, and the next day it broke on the neighbourhood like a thunderclap that the Grange was sold to a "Mr. Lambert," and would know the Alwyns no more.

Nothing was ever heard of them. A local solicitor collected every claim against them and settled it in full, but when Mr. Vesey was pressed by Sir Bryan's friends to give them his address, he declared he had no knowledge of the Baronet's abode. The latter had called to bring him the large cheque needed to settle his liabilities, and had specially said he was on the point of leaving England; further than this the lawyer could not say.

"I've known Sir Bryan for years," said the little old man, simply, "and I thought it would be easy enough for me to ask him his plans and where they were going to live, but somehow, when I'd got as far as hoping it wouldn't be long before I saw him again, he cut me quite short, not so much by words as by a look there was in his face. 'The past is past and over, Vesey. We won't talk of the future—good-bye!' What could I say after that?"

For a month Moorshire mourned the Alwyns faithfully, then it began to take a faint interest in their successors. Then Mr. Lambert was a parvenu, they had never heard of him in their life before, but to buy the Grange he must have money, and it might be as well to cultivate him. Alas, for Moorshire!

Mr. Lambert refused all invitations, declared he had no time for society; he was a plain, business man with no taste for fashionable amusements.

Moorshire marvelled why he had bought the Grange. Then a fresh surprise awaited the place. The fields and grounds which had been somewhat neglected under Sir Bryan's sway, were enclosed by a close fence, and given over to quite an army of gardeners, while one wing of the house itself was pulled down bodily, and it oozed out gradually only the lower story was to be rebuilt, and was to consist exclusively of bath rooms—society gasped. Moorshire folks approved of washing, but surely two or three bath rooms sufficed for a private house, and here was Mr. Lambert building a score.

A faint rumour got about that Bedford Hall was to be converted into a superior lunatic asylum for patients of high rank, and Mr. Vesey, who had occasional dealings with the new Squire, was deputed to ask him the question point blank.

Peter Lambert gave a hearty chuckle, and declared he shouldn't be at all surprised if most people called his place a lunatic asylum. He wasn't at all sure the inmates would be remarkable for their sanity, but of two things Moorshire might rest easy. He shouldn't receive anyone who was "violent," and no one would be retained against their will.

Moorshire felt indignant. It was such a very exclusive, aristocratic county that it did not at all like Mr. Lambert's eccentricity. Moortown itself—only six miles from Bedford Hall—was a cathedral city.

That part of the county was noted for its climate. Invalids had delighted to winter there and enjoy the mild, salubrious air and lovely scenery; but with a mad house in the vicinity, who would venture?

On the whole Moorshire would rather have

preferred a prison to be erected in its midst; and the Bishop, a benevolent, genial natured man, said he would far rather have seen the Grange turned into a reformatory.

"You can think then its doing some good, and as the lads are kept within their own gates one has nothing to fear; but lunatics are quite another thing. They are so cunning they are always trying to escape, and we might be murdered in our beds, or burnt to death without a moment's preparation!"

Mr. Vesey smiled. He had a keen sense of humour, and he felt tolerably certain Peter Lambert was not going to start a lunatic asylum, in spite of his strange speech, so he only answered, cheerfully,—

"I don't think it 'll be as bad as that, my lord; but if you are anxious it might be as well for you to see Mr. Lambert yourself."

The Bishop hesitated. Although he belonged to the church militant, he was a meek man by nature, and he did not feel inclined for a verbal fight with Mr. Peter Lambert.

"Well, really you know, Vesey," he said, hesitatingly, "an Englishman's house is his castle, and as Lambert has bought the Grange we've no right to interfere with him whatever he does with it."

The lawyer smiled.

"I am quite sure, my lord, he would consider a visit from you an honour. Indeed he told me last week he thought of calling on you to suggest your patronage!"

The Bishop's hair was scanty, but what remained of it fairly stood on end with horror at this extraordinary speech.

"I never had a case of insanity in my family!" he panted, indignantly. "What can the fellow be thinking of to suggest such a thing?"

But bishops are only mortal, and no more devoid of curiosity than their fellow creatures. So when a very courteously worded invitation arrived for his Grace of Moortown to lunch at Bedford Hall, to meet Sir Jonathan Tenge and Dr. Gaine, a very noted specialist, he actually accepted, and on the day appointed reached Mr. Lambert's house punctually at two.

He had never been there since Sir Bryan's departure, now almost a year ago, and he was astonished at the changes.

Money had been spent with a lavish hand, but so skilfully that there seemed nothing ostentatious about the place. The luxury of the whole appealed to the Bishop's good taste, but at the same time he confessed that there was nothing which did not conduce in some measure to mental enjoyment or physical comfort. Sir Jonathan, who was an old acquaintance, greeted the Bishop warmly.

"I think it'll do," said the big wig, putting in his eye-glass, and glancing round. "Our friend Lambert does things rather lavishly; but it ought to turn out a splendid success, a perfect gold mine!"

The Bishop stared.

"Then you really approve of it."

"Approve of it. My dear lord, why if such things as this had been started fifty years ago I shouldn't have half the nervous, hysterical patients on my hands, I have now among the upper middle classes. The greatest cause of illness is dullness. What women want isn't medicine nine times out of ten, but society, amusement, relaxation. Well, they'll get it here."

"In a mad house?" inquired the Bishop, courteously. "Surely the society of the insane must be bad for nervous patients?"

Sir Jonathan laughed till he nearly cried.

"You actually thought this a mad house. Lambert told me the idea had got abroad; but I never credited you with being deceived."

"I'm not deceived," declared the Bishop, "you said just now it was a mad house where you should send your patients."

Mr. Lambert and Dr. Gaine joined them then, and the Bishop was enlightened; Bedford Hall was not a mad-house nor even an abode for people of weak intellect.

It was to be a kind of residential club for those able to pay for the comforts of a luxurious home, and objecting to the worries of housekeeping, or the casualties of hotel life.

Bedford Hall would boast a chaplain and a resident doctor. It would have every convenience for electric baths, massage, and other modern curatives. A French *chef* would preside over the cuisine, a library—in connexion with Mudie's—and a billiard room, a small theatre and concert hall were provided.

There were carriages of all sorts in the stables, and the meals were so arranged that it was quite possible for business men to go to Flanneton, the great manufacturing city twenty miles off, for the day's toil, and return in time for dinner.

The Bishop was bewildered.

"It's just like an hotel," he said.

"No," explained Mr. Lambert, blandly. "I don't like to contradict your lordship, but that is just what it is not. At an hotel, people can, if they choose, live quite isolated from their fellow creatures. The chief principle of Bedford Hall is sociability; the terms once paid, everyone beneath the roof will be on an equality, while there is every opportunity for people to shirk what intimacies they please; but there will be a general acquaintance among us all."

The Bishop, who knew Moorshire ways, rather doubted this.

Dr. Gaine took up the tale.

"Any weary brain, or nervous, desponding patient would find this place a veritable palace of delight," he said, frankly. "Of course the terms are high; they are, in fact, sufficiently prohibitive to exclude the denizens of boarding-houses. We all know so well the 'oldest inhabitant' who has a prescriptive right to the most luxurious chair and the best seat at table. Mr. Lambert's idea is that people will come here when they need a change and rest. He has no more idea of anyone living here from one year's end to another than the people who exert themselves to afford a fortnight at the sea in summer have of passing their lives by the coast."

The Bishop began to understand.

"You admit people for a short time than?"

"Oh, yes. Our terms begin at a guinea a day; baths and wine, etcetera, are extra; the library and all amusements are free. There are no fees to servants."

"Pet dogs are charged the same as children," said Mr. Lambert, drily. "They are such a frequent source of quarrels that we did not want to attract too many. Servants are charged three-fourths of the usual fees."

"And when do you open?"

"We open next Monday," said Peter Lambert, with a quiet air of triumph. "Sir Jonathan has ordered a whole family here while the drainage of their own house is overhauled. Dr. Gaine is sending a baronet who has broken his arm, and is perforce obliged to keep perfectly quiet. One lady resident and physician are already engaged."

"And the chaplain?" inquired the Bishop, feeling this was his department.

"For the first six months, till we see if the venture succeeds, we have decided on inviting one of the Hamerton curates. There are dozens of them who never get a holiday all the year round. A fortnight in this beautiful air, and partaking of all the comforts of the Hall, will be a welcome change to many of them. Already seven of them are eagerly awaiting their 'turn,' and no doubt others will be found when these are exhausted. We offer no remuneration beyond the expenses of a first class journey."

"You have a wonderful head," said the Bishop, admiringly. "Each curate will 'talk' of the wonders of the Hall for months. It will be better than a hundred advertisements."

"And I may count on your patronage, my lord?" asked the proprietor, rather eagerly.

"I shall be delighted to come on the first of May for a fortnight. I will bring up my wife and daughter," said the Bishop, promptly.

Now, Mrs. Graham, like John Gilpin's wife, possessed a frugal mind, and when she heard of the arrangement she was horrified.

"Three guineas a day!" the poor lady exclaimed, "to stay at a place we know by heart. Why the trip will cost forty-five pounds."

"Only thirty," returned the Bishop. "The terms are five pounds a week."

"Thirty pounds!" mourned his better better half. "Why, we might have gone to London and seen the Academy for half."

"Listen, Alice. I don't often ask you to go against your inclinations, and I particularly want you to spend a fortnight at Bedford Hall. I have an idea you will enjoy it very much; but if you don't, if you can tell me you have not had a pleasant change, why I promise you to take you and Queenie to London later on."

But Mrs. Graham could never claim the promise. She was wont to refer to the fortnight at Bedford Hall later on as the pleasantest she had ever spent. She, mistress of a large household, with no private means, and—for the position and hospitality it required—a small official income, was blessed with thirteen children.

Mrs. Graham had perforce fallen a little into the *rôle* of Martha. She was always trying to save money. From the moment she entered the vestibule of Bedford Hall, her burdens seemed to drop off. She was responsible for nothing, she need not ponder if there was waste in the kitchen, or if the servants were punctual; she need not marvel if the meals would be sufficient for uninvited visitors. She could rest.

Queenie, otherwise Elsie Graham, had been most adverse to the stay at Bedford Hall, but when she came into her mother's dressing-room ready for dinner, her brow was clear, and she seemed as favourably impressed as Mrs. Graham.

"It's beautiful, mamma, everything one could possibly want, and such a nice girl came to see if I wanted help as I had brought no maid. She fetched me these flowers for my hair. I thought I wanted something, as there is to be carpet dance after dinner. Dr. Graham was of the school of bishops who permit their families to trip the light fantastic toe."

The mother smiled.

"Then you think you will enjoy yourself, Elsie?"

The particular curate just then taking duty at the Hall, was a special *protégée* of Mrs. Graham who always mourned because his abilities, by no means equal to his virtues, had not procured him a living. It goes without saying that Mrs. Langley was only too delighted to introduce his Bishop's wife and daughter to all the notables present. Mrs. Graham felt perfectly happy when she saw Elsie going in to dinner with the disabled Baronet—he still wore his arm in a sling—and decided they had done well to come.

The carpet dance was a success. The next night there was a concert, the next acting; the third tableaux; there was always something going on, got up apparently without effort on anyone's part, and always giving general satisfaction. There were plenty of young people, just a sprinkling of matrons, and a few—very few—*pater familias*

Before the Grahams left Elsie had promised to be an honorary member of the Hall tennis club, and Sir Gerald Ainslie had announced his intention of coming over to the palace to see the Bishop's library.

"I feel years younger," said Alice Graham to her husband when the day came for them to return home. "No holiday ever did me so much good before!"

The Bishop did not say "I told you so," he only smiled in a well-satisfied manner, and told Mr. Lambert he should never lose a chance of recommending the Hall to all his

friends. Probably other patrons promised to do the same, and their recommendations were peculiarly effectual for the Hall scheme, and Mr. Lambert, with a smiling face, declared himself well satisfied with the success of his venture.

"I paid twelve thousand for the place as it stood," he told the Bishop in a moment of confidence, "and spent another three on alterations and improvements. It wasn't my own money either. I had to borrow most of it at stiffish interest; but in three years' time I'd paid off every claim and the place was free and unencumbered. Since that my profits have never been less than five thousand a year, and the property has improved so much in value that I could sell it any day for double the price I gave for it."

It was perfectly true. Unlike many new schemes Bedford Hall flourished even when the novelty had worn off. Whether it met a decided want, whether the physicians' support made it flourish no one knew, but it was a complete success. Even the aristocracy of Moorshire could not ignore the place, for had not the Bishop's penniless daughter there found her wealthy husband? Was not pretty Lady Ainslie a standing proof that very desirable marriages were sometimes "arranged" at the Hall.

But though the aristocracy smiled on Mr. Lambert, his real patrons were the upper middle-class, people who had won for themselves great wealth in trade, and were too grand for their old surroundings, yet had no acquaintances in the great world they longed to enter and suffered in consequence from the deadly complaint of "dulness."

These flocked to Bedford Hall, and after Mr. Lambert's great coup of engaging a lady of title as his "Lady Resident," they came in shoals. Lady Emily Jendal always laughed when her relations asked why she took up such a strange mode of life. The penniless daughter of an Irish Earl, she had married a needy officer, and on his death found herself with only a scanty pension, but she was too proud to live on her relations, and thought it a lucky day when the Bishop of Moortown introduced her to Mr. Lambert.

"I can't keep house," she told him, frankly, "and I am not in the least what people call a 'good manager,' but I have lived for ten years at an Indian station, and had to keep the place with about a dozen officers' wives, all touchy and prone to take offence. I never had a quarrel or even a misunderstanding with one of them, and the Colonel told me I had more tact than any woman he ever met. If tact and a profound acquaintance with etiquette will compensate for my lack of housewifery knowledge, Mr. Lambert, I will gladly come to you."

She came. She gained an easeful home and complete independence, while her presence set the seal on Mr. Lambert's success. From that time prosperity flowed in unstinted measure to Bedford Hall. Women who had never thought to speak to a lady of title were delighted to live in the same house with one, and to be able to talk of "dear Lady Emily." But though reconciled in a measure to Bedford Hall, Moorshire still troubled itself a great deal about Peter Lambert himself. Who was he? Whence had he sprung from when he made his appearance to buy the old Grange? Why in all these years had he never sought a wife to share his prosperity, for it was plain to all that he was building up a princely fortune.

Pressed on these points, the Bishop and Lady Emily, who were regarded for no known reason as in Mr. Lambert's confidence, could give very little information.

The proprietor had a suite of rooms at the Hall; but though the moving spirit of the venture, he interfered very little with its management. He spent two hours a day with his secretary, and then his work was ended.

He rode a great deal, spent much time in reading; but though always ready to join in any amusement going on he never grew intimate with one of his guests.

"A good fellow," said the Bishop, "but very reticent."

Dr. Burnside, the medical attendant at the Hall, declared his employer was a widower. Asked how he knew this, the young man was quite non plussed, but declared he "had heard it somewhere." From this society took up the notion that the one holiday Mr. Lambert allowed himself—the month of August he was invariably absent from Bedford Hall—he spent in visiting his wife's grave.

CHAPTER II.

Near Victoria Station, but far enough removed from the fashionable region of Belgravia, in the somewhat dreary part of the district, which lies between the great terminus and Vauxhall Bridge there runs a long, dull, unpretending sort of thoroughfare known as Lullingham-street.

Perhaps whoever gave the name thought it appropriate, because here came a lull in the noise and bustle of the great city, for it was certainly a quiet street.

There were no shops, and though the cards of "apartments to let" appeared in many of the windows, yet a few of the straight, dingy-looking houses were private residences, and one of them boasted a large brass plate with the inscription,—

"Niel Walney, M.D."

When that plate first appeared wiseacres shrugged their shoulders, and declared the new doctor would rue the day he settled in Lullingham-street. People, they argued, would not go to a new unknown man while old-established firms were within a stone's throw.

He had better have bought a "share" in some practice already made, or if he could not afford that have gone out as an assistant. He would never get bread and cheese out of the perchance patients he might gain in time here.

No one knew who started the report, but it gradually got about that Dr. Walney was a foreigner. Even his degree had been obtained at some foreign university, and though the young man was most English in his appearance, voice, and manner, yet the prejudice gained ground, and a few who might have sought his aid went elsewhere, preferring not to trust themselves to a foreigner.

If they had only known! Until he was twenty-four Niel Walney had never been out of England. He had been educated at Eton and Oxford, and had never thought to leave his native land for years, and only return to it as a struggling embryo doctor.

If they had taken the trouble to inquire, they would have discovered that he had passed his examination brilliantly, and was highly esteemed in the city, where he took his degree. In short, but for a strange home-sickness which made him long to tread once more on English ground, Niel Walney might have done well for himself abroad.

As it was he came back to his native land with little more than two hundred pounds at his disposal. Half this small capital went in furnishing the dreary-looking house in Lullingham-street. Of the other half very little remained after eight months' struggle to get together a practice.

"I can't think what made you settle here," said a fellow student, who now had a snug berth as resident surgeon at a country hospital.

Jack Nairn and Dr. Walney were sworn friends, and the former, on his rare trips to London never failed to look in at Lullingham-street.

Niel Walney pushed back his hair with his hand, a favourite trick of his, as he answered,—

"I suppose it was a mad idea; but, you see, Jack, I hankered after England. I believe I actually longed to settle in my native land."

"But why not have taken a berth like mine?"

"Because I am a few years older," said Niel, frankly, "and I have an intense love of independence and quiet. I think the life in a hospital would drive me mad. I shouldn't mind how hard I worked; but to live there, to feel the very air I breathed always full of sighs and groans—I couldn't stand it. I should feel I ought not even to smoke a pipe in my own rooms lest it was a mockery to the grief of some poor creature called to take a last farewell of father, mother, or child."

"You're too sensitive."

"Perhaps," Niel smiled, half sadly. "I confess, though life here may seem dreary enough to you, if I could have made it pay I should have been quite content."

"And it doesn't pay?"

"Thirty-five shillings represent the amount of my fees since Easter. Since I first came I have earned perhaps seven pounds. Not a guinea a month!"

"That won't do."

"No," Niel took a turn round the room, almost savagely. "I shall have to think of something else, or when my nest egg is exhausted I shall come near starving, yet—I expect you to laugh, Nairn—do you know I am rather fond of this house. Poor place though it is, it's the first home I've had for seven years."

"You're such a strange fellow," said Jack, diffidently, "you might be offended; but I believe I know of something that might suit you, just while you made up your mind."

"I'm not likely to be offended, but I warn you, Jack, no one will have me as assistant. They seem to decide by instinct that I'm not meek enough; and I can't stand hospitals."

"Could you stand being the medical head of a Sanatorium, my cousin has had the post for five years, and he is leaving to be married? I had a letter from him this morning, offering to introduce me to his employer, but it's not in my line."

"I doubt if it's in mine. What are the duties?"

"So far as I can make out, they are extremely light. Most of the inmates of the Hall only come down for rest and change. Now and again you get a bad case that wants a great deal of care. There is no doctor in the immediate neighbourhood, and Ted picked up a good many private patients. The salary is four hundred a-year, private rooms and board."

"It sounds liberal."

"I rather fancy the man at the head of the concern is liberality itself. Ted swears by him; but two essential qualifications are that the resident doctor should be unmarried and an M.D. His *fiancée* has waited for him a long while, and I suppose he thought he couldn't defer his hymeneal bliss any longer."

"Four hundred a-year!" said Walney, with a sigh. "There will be hundreds of candidates; I should have no chance."

"It won't be advertised, and Ted's influence will go a long way. Why shouldn't you try it for a year, Walney? Then if you feel an irresistible longing for solitary independence, you might come back here. The rent is not enormous, is it?"

"Forty, including taxes. This isn't an expensive part. Old Martha would thankfully stay here as caretaker for a trifle. If I stayed at the Sanitorium twelve months, I could earn enough to enable me to carry on the battle here for two years."

"I'll write to Ted to-night. I'm sure it'll be all right, Walney; I shall praise you up to the skies."

"You haven't told me yet where the Sanatorium is situated—east, west, north or south."

"South decidedly. It's in Moorshire; splendid climate. It was opened six or seven years ago, and has been a big success. The proprietor must have netted thousands. I went

down there once to see Ted, and I enjoyed myself amazingly."

"I used to know Moorshire," said Walney, slowly; "but I don't remember any place called Bedford Hall. Is it near Moortown?"

"Within a drive. It used to be called Alwyn Grange, after the original owners, but Mr. Lambert changed the name for some fancy of his own."

Dr. Walney turned from the table to empty the ashes of his pipe. The little action seemed to take a very long time, or Jack Nairn thought so.

"Is Mr. Lambert a gentleman?"

"Not to the manner born. He's a very pleasant fellow though; but he doesn't interfere much with the Hall, though it was started entirely according to his own ideas. Lady Emily Jendal is at the head of it now—the Lady Resident they call her. I took an enormous fancy to her."

"Is she young?" asked Dr. Walney, so anxiously, that Jack Nairn laughed outright.

"She is over forty; and though she is always cheerful and bright, I believe her heart is buried in her husband's grave. It was a love match, and they were devoted to each other. I assure you, my dear Mr. Misanthrope, you need not have the smallest fear of Lady Emily even attempting to flirt with you."

"I hate women," said Dr. Walney, frankly; "they are all so heartless and mercenary."

"Well, I never met one who was either, but perhaps your experience has been more extensive. It's a thousand pities you are such a woman-hater, Niel, for the fair sex always smile on you."

Niel Walney did not open a turned down page in his life and tell of a beautiful coquette who had promised to be his bride, and jilted him without a scruple when she discovered he was less wealthy than she imagined. He was not one to expose his old wounds even to friendly eyes; he only said, gravely,—

"I don't suppose my sentiments will affect Mr. Lambert's decision. It can't be the duty of the house-surgeon to flirt with the lady visitors."

"Don't talk so bitterly," said the younger man, half sadly; "and, Walney, old fellow, don't refuse this post if it's offered you, for I don't believe your much prized loneliness is doing you any good. If you only stay at Bedford Hall for six months, mixing with your fellow creatures even for that short time, may prevent your turning quite into a misanthrope."

"Don't be alarmed," retorted Niel, "I shall jump at the post if Mr. Lambert offers it me, but he won't. Such a piece of luck is not likely to come my way, I was born under an evil star."

But if he was, fate seemed to relent for once, and smile on him just for a change.

Dr. Burnside wrote and made a few professional inquiries as to Dr. Walney's qualifications, etcetera; and after a brief delay, came a letter from Mr. Lambert, offering Niel the post for six months.

"It will be pleasanter for us both if you come at first only as a temporary thing, for I need not tell you that the post is one needing many things besides mere professional skill, and you may find our life irksome. I hope you will be able to come on Monday. Dr. Burnside leaves on that day, and I don't want to be left without professional aid longer than can be avoided."

Niel Walney wrote off at once, promising to arrive at Bedford Hall on Monday evening. Then, from an old desk, he took out a faded, somewhat indistinct photograph, and after a careful examination of the pictured face, he turned to contemplate his own visage in the glass.

He saw a man of over six feet, broad-shouldered, erect and well formed, with something almost military in his bearing. He saw a stern, thoughtful face lit up by dark intensely blue eyes. A long, silky moustache hid the rather cynical upper lip and a long, brown beard made him look more than his thirty-one years, but at the same time exactly suited his style of good looks. It was a handsome face. Even Dr. Walney's enemies would have admitted that much, but it was not a happy one.

Perhaps the strange sadness which always, more or less, hung over Niel, had a fascination of its own, and was one of the reasons why he was always—as Jack Nairn put it—a favourite with the fair sex.

"No," muttered Dr. Walney, coolly, tearing the photograph into minute pieces. "I think it is tolerably safe, but all the same I would rather Bedford Hall had been in any county than Moorshire."

He made his few preparations methodically enough. Old Martha was only too thankful to undertake the charge of No. 19, Lullingham-street, and declared that ten shillings a week would amply pay her as board wages; she should take in a little needlework for her spare time.

"And the house 'll always be ready, sir, whenever you're in a mind to come back; and I shall keep the plate shining like gold, just to warn the other doctors they needn't think of setting up in Lullingham-street."

It was the beginning of July; a delightful time to be going out of London. Niel felt well content with his destiny as he stood by the bookstall at Charing Cross station.

Selecting a number of papers to read on the journey, it was pleasant to think that to-morrow he should awake to country sounds and rural scents.

He wondered what kind of a man Peter Lambert would prove, and whether they should "get on" together; and then the station clock reminded him that it was time to choose a carriage if he did not want to be late.

All the smoking ones had occupants, and Niel was not inclined for company, so he ensconced himself in an empty first class, and devoutly hoped no one would disturb his solitude. Vain hope! At London Bridge a middle-aged female of the strong-minded type, literally bombarded the compartment. She seized the handle before the train had even stopped, running along with it in cheerful disregard of the bye-laws directing passengers not to attempt to enter a train during motion; as soon as ever it stopped she flung the door open, exclaimed in a relieved tone,—

"Ah! plenty of room!" and then drew back for an instant—as Niel imagined—to collect a tribe of small children, but the next moment she returned with one girl, whom she handed in much as though she had been a bale of luggage, exclaiming,—

"And you will explain to the Herr papa. You will be sure to make it clear to him."

"To be sure," said the girl, frankly. "Dad will be only too pleased to see me a month before he expects me. Don't be afraid, Fraulein."

"If I had only telegraphed," said the German, wringing her hands, and quite forgetting she might even now mend her mistake; "but you will explain, and the Herr father is so friendly he will comprehend."

The train moved on before the girl could attempt to reassure her further.

Niel noticed one thing about his companion which pleased him. She did not attempt to laugh at the German lady's anxiety, and she waved her hand to the gesticulating figure on the platform long after they had fairly started.

She looked a mere child, and was evidently, from the conversation he had overheard, going home from school, so Niel did not think it necessary to treat her with the formality due to a grown up demoiselle.

He offered her his *Graphic*, and was amused rather than offended when she replied she would rather look out of the window.

"You mustn't think me rude," she explained, sweetly; "but I haven't been in England for seven years, and everything seems so new and strange."

"You have been at school for seven years?"

"Yes, how did you guess that? Dad used to come over every year to spend August with me, and he promised when he came this year he would take me home for good; but one of the girls has scarlet fever, and madam got in a great fright, and thought it would be better to send us all home, so Fraulein brought the four English girls home last night. We had to come by Dieppe because three of them lived at Brighton, and then she came on to London Bridge with me. Poor Fraulein! she gets so anxious when she is travelling, and now she will have to cross from Newhaven again to-night."

"And your parents are not expecting you?"

"I have no mother. Fraulein forgot to telegraph to Dad this morning, and it was no use her doing it now, for he would have left his club hours ago."

It was five o'clock, so Niel hardly agreed with this argument; but he only asked the child, pleasantly, if she had far to go?

"I don't know exactly. Fraulein took my ticket to Moortown, she said I had better ask there which was the nearest station for the Hall."

The Hall! It was only a strange coincidence. She could not possibly be going to Bedford Hall.

"Don't you remember the name of the station?"

"No," she blushed. "When I went to school we lived in a shabby little house in London; but Dad is better off now, and has a nice house in the country. He would never let me come home for the holidays because he wanted to surprise me when I was quite grown up; but now, you see," with a charming smile, "I am going to surprise him."

"But if the house is some miles from the station," suggested Dr. Walney, "your father might like to send and meet you. Shall I telegraph for you from the next station, it would be easy to send the message to the Hall and not to any club."

"I think it will be better not," said the girl, simply. "I always wrote to papa at his club, he preferred it. Perhaps the Hall is a long way from the post-office, and they don't deliver telegrams. Do you know Moortown?"

"I am going there myself, and I will make any inquiry for you."

"Perhaps they will know papa," said the girl, naively, "he has lived there for seven years."

Walney wondered what possessed the father to keep his address secret. There was an air of mystery about the whole proceeding which puzzled him. Just then Hilda's little handbag fell down, and as he stooped to pick it up for her Niel could not help reading the name on the label.

"Mademoiselle Lambert!"

He started. Jack Nairn had certainly spoken of the master of Bedford Hall as a bachelor.

"Is it possible that you are daughter of Mr. Peter Lambert?" he asked Hilda.

She smiled.

"Yes, Dad's name is Peter, and I am his only child. Do you know him?"

"I have never met him, but I am now on my way to see him. May I introduce myself to you, Miss Lambert, as Dr. Walney?"

Hilda grew white as death.

"Do you mean that Dad is very ill, and has sent for you to doctor him?"

"Certainly not. He——"

"You said you had never seen him, but you were going to the Hall. Why should he send for a strange doctor if he isn't ill?"

"I assure you Mr. Lambert is in good health. I am going to the Hall not on his account. I mean he will not be my patient."

But Hilda was thoroughly aroused now,

and Niel found her questions difficult to parry.

"Papa would not send to London for a stranger to doctor the servants. Do you mean that anyone lives with him?"

Niel kept silent because he really could think of nothing to say. That Miss Lambert ignored the existence of the Sanatorium he felt sure, and he had a strong suspicion she would disapprove of it.

"Well?" demanded Hilda. "Please answer my question."

"I have never been to Bedford Hall," stammered Niel, "and I would rather——"

He was not allowed to finish. The pretty child turned to him with tears streaming down her face.

"I see what it is, you know the truth. Dad has married again, and you feel sorry for me and do not like to tell me, but I would rather know."

"Indeed, Miss Lambert, I have not even heard a rumour of your father's marriage. I believed him a bachelor."

"The girls at school were horrid," confessed Hilda. "I think they were jealous because dad was so good to me, and they used to declare he would marry again, and that when I had a stepmother he would forget all about me. It is very wicked of me, Dr. Walney, but dad is all I have, and if he married I should be miserable."

"You need have no fears as far as I know," answered Niel, kindly. "You should not have been frightened by school-girl malice."

"It was not only that," she confessed. "I was a little hurt because dad would never let me come home, and because he never told me anything about the Hall. Sometimes I used to fancy he was married and had two or three new children, and that he could not have me home because his wife objected."

"Don't you think you were rather foolish?" asked Niel, kindly.

"Perhaps. But it seemed so strange. I knew it wasn't money, because dad never denied me anything. He would take me just anywhere else I pleased when he came over each August, but he would never hear of my coming to England."

"He must have had some good reason."

"I—I suppose so. But I am grown up now, and I don't like being treated like a child."

"Perhaps Mr. Lambert remembers you as the little child he took to school seven years ago?"

"I wasn't so very little. I was nearly twelve."

"You cannot possibly mean that you are eighteen now?"

"Indeed, I do. I shall be nineteen next month. I don't mind you being surprised, Dr. Walney. People never will believe me. At school madame would call me her English baby. It is very hard, for I can't help being short."

"Don't quarrel with your youth, Miss Lambert," said Niel, simply, "it is a gift many of us would dearly prize."

She kept silent just five minutes, then with a quiet little persistent air she observed,—

"You haven't told me yet why you are going to Bedford Hall."

"Do you object to my going?" he demanded. "Will my presence there annoy you like that of the mythical stepmother whose existence your imagination conjured up?"

"How funny you are!" said Hilda, simply. "Why should I object to your staying with us? Only if you have never seen dad it's odd."

"I must leave the explanation to Mr. Lambert," said Niel, in despair. "We are almost at Moortown, Miss Lambert. Your father promised to send to meet me, so there will be no difficulty in your reaching your destination."

"Wasn't it lucky Fraulein put me into your carriage?" suggested the girl, warmly. "For you have saved me from waiting at Moortown to be sent on like a parcel."

"Very lucky," he answered, absently, his thoughts were busy now with the last time he had been at Moortown station. Well, seven years had not made so much change in the old place as in himself.

A groom in livery appeared—it seemed to Walney and Hilda almost before the train stopped. He opened the door and touched his hat to the doctor.

"Are you for the Hall, sir?"

"Yes," and Walney gave up his bag, adding without attempting any explanation, "and so is this lady."

The man was too well trained a servant to express any surprise, but he observed, respectfully,—

"Lady Emily didn't tell me, sir, and I've only got the dog-cart here, and it only holds two. If you could drive the young lady, I'd follow with the luggage. Anyone would tell you the way to the Hall. There isn't any conveyance to be had at this station and it seems the only way."

"I will drive with pleasure," said Walney, who feared Hilda would begin to cry on the spot so cast down did she look at the bare mention of "Lady Emily." Reflecting the labels on her luggage would reveal her identity to the groom, Niel followed the latter to the dog cart, handed Hilda to her seat, sprang up after her, and took the reins.

He had not driven for a long time, but he had once been a first-rate whip, and James saw quite enough to convince him his treasured mare was in good hands before he retired to seek the spring cart and find a seat with the driver, the two beguiling their way by much speculation as to the unexpected "Miss Lambert," and debating as to whether she would prove their master's daughter or sister.

CHAPTER III.

"Are you comfortable, Miss Lambert?"

No answer.

"This it very pretty scenery."

The second remark met the same fate as his first. Neil stopped the mare abruptly, and asked.

"Is anything the matter?"

"Yes; no! I think you have deceived me shamefully. You said father wasn't married!"

"And he is not."

"You heard what the groom said. He has had no orders from Lady Emily; indeed, she ought to be plain Mrs. Lambert, and not be ashamed of her husband's name!"

"Unfortunately, it is the custom for an Earl's daughter to retain her courtesy title of 'Lady' unless she marries a peer."

"My father is quite as good as a peer, though he mightn't be handsome or fashionable."

"Doubtless; but Lady Emily has not married him. She is the widow of an officer, and," he hesitates—"presides over domestic affairs at Bedford Hall."

"A housekeeper?"

"Not precisely."

"Well," said Hilda, "she will go of course now I have come home. Dad won't want two housekeepers, and madame says she has made me quite domesticated. I can order the dinners and see to things!"

Niel thought of this pretty child attempting to manage over twenty servants, and a French *chef*, but he did not enlighten her that her father had two housekeepers already, one to hold sway over the domestics, the other to preside at his table.

"It's a large house," he said, slowly, "perhaps Mr. Lambert has told you so?"

"Well, I like a good-sized house," said Hilda, appreciatively, "where we lived when I left England we had only six rooms. I think ten or even twelve would be nice, for I shall want a drawing-room besides father's study, and a spare bedroom for friends is always useful."

"Always," thinking absently that when he had last seen the house they were bound for, it had boasted twenty bedrooms besides the servants' wing.

Through the lodge gates, the man bit his lips at the evidence of their prosperity, the velvet lawn, mowed by experienced hands, the weedless paths, the luxuriant flowers, all speaking of labour and money freely bestowed. The grounds has been like a wilderness when he saw them last. The front of the house was almost unchanged, save for the new wing containing the bath-rooms, and that at one end a large winter garden entirely roofed in with glass, had been added. Neil Walney felt a sort of pang, almost as though he had come back from the dead, when he flung the reins to a servant, and offered his hand to assist Hilda to alight.

"There must be some mistake," the girl said, gravely. "Dad can't live here!"

The hall porter received them with the utmost respect. Mr. Lambert was in his private study, he hoped Dr. Walney would see him there for a few minutes before going to his own rooms.

Niel looked at Hilda. He was amazed at the change in her. She had drawn herself up with a little air of dignity, and betrayed no trace of emotion or feeling as she said, coldly, to the porter,—

"I wish to see Mr. Lambert also, therefore, I conclude I can go with Dr. Walney to his study?"

The porter looked perplexed.

"The master rarely sees ladies, madam. Lady Emily mostly——"

Niel trembled for Hilda's patience at the repetition of that name, but to his intense relief, before the porter could finish his sentence, a pleasant-looking middle-aged man came towards them, and with a sudden cry of "Father!" forgetting all witnesses and all suspicions, the girl sprang into his arms.

She had no cause to complain of her welcome; but Mr. Lambert remembered the porter and Niel. He turned to them at once.

"Dr. Walney, you will I am sure excuse me for half-an-hour. Edmunds, show Dr. Walney to his own rooms, and tell Lady Emily that my daughter, Miss Lambert, has arrived from Paris."

The porter touched a bell, and a small page appeared. He ushered Niel through several passages to a door labelled "medical officer," going through this they came first to a pretty little reception room, evidently used for the doctor to interview patients, beyond was a good-sized bedroom, which opened again to a charming little snuggery, the odour of tobacco which still clung to it proclaiming that Dr. Burnside had smoked pretty often in his own den.

"This other door leads to one of the corridors," explained the boy. "I'll bring up tea at once, sir, we dine at seven."

It wanted but half-an-hour of that time now, so Niel declared he would dispense with tea. He unpacked his portmanteau, and got into his dress suit, which had had a long rest in Lullingham-street, that locality not being given to don evening attire, this did not take long, as he hurried in case the manager should wish to speak to him before dinner.

In the ante-room he found a list of the guests then staying in the house, and discovered, with a feeling half of pain, half of curiosity, that his false love of other days was one of the visitors.

"Lord and Lady Castleton, Miss Castleton, ran the line; but Niel fancied there must be some mistake. The Lord Castleton, he remembered, was turned sixty, and bedridden, it seemed improbable that he should go from home even to a Sanitorium.

Turning over this list, Niel noticed that each party of guests was distinguished by a number, while on the following page the same numbers appeared again without names; but with a brief, terse criticism. No doubt this

had been Dr. Burnside's private list, and he had generously left it for the benefit of his successor.

Almost involuntarily Niel turned to number fifteen, it was natural he should feel most interest in the people he had once known. This was what he read,—

"Delightful couple. Wife a martyr to neuralgia. Electric baths, cheerful society only treatment that can be pursued. Real remedy, removal of her sister-in-law, whose temper is at the bottom of the poor lady's aches and pains!"

Yes! it all came back to Niel now. Young Clive Castleton had displeased his parents by marrying a penniless orphan. They had refused to receive the wife, but had been powerless to disinherit her husband.

Clive was the reigning peer now, but Charlotte shared his home, and made things hard for the young wife.

Why had she not married herself? When she jilted him a wealthy baronet and a fox-hunting peer had both been paying her ardent attentions. How came it then that at thirty-one she was still Miss Castleton.

"My father never liked her," reflected Niel, half sadly. "He used to say the one thing that reconciled him to his own poverty was it had saved me from Charlotte Castleton; but I always thought she had married long ago. She was so handsome and clever I can't fancy her an old maid."

Miss Castleton's age was the same as his own within a month. Long as it was since he had mixed in English society, Niel knew perfectly that at thirty-one, an unmarried woman is usually regarded as on the shelf, and unlikely to change her conditions.

His reflections were interrupted by the arrival of the manager. To Niel's surprise, he found himself actually pitying Mr. Lambert, he looked so perturbed.

"I hope you find things comfortable," he said to Dr. Walney. "My friend, Dr. Burnside, had been here so long that he seemed like part and parcel of the place, and I may forget you are not equally at home. I don't think the medical duties are arduous just now; no one here is seriously ill, but a good many of them want a little practical advice and a great deal of sympathy. Ever been in Moorshire before, Dr. Walney?"

"Not for many years. I must congratulate you on Bedford Hall, Mr. Lambert. It seems to me a modern palace of delight."

Lambert sighed. He was an impulsive man, and he had taken a fancy to Niel probably because the latter was so different to himself.

"The scheme was entirely my own, and it has succeeded beyond my hopes, but I wanted to make a fortune for my daughter, and I kept the way of making it a secret from her. Hilda was a mere child when I started this place. I couldn't have her here while she was in the transitory stage, between the nursery and the drawing room. I meant to go over to Paris in three weeks and explain everything to her, and now this confounded—I beg your pardon—scarlet fever has sent her home without a word of notice, and everything comes on her like a terrific surprise."

"And Miss Lambert dislikes Bedford Hall?"

"Dislikes it! She told me I might as well keep a public house; and when I begged her to be introduced to Lady Emily Jendal and join us at dinner, she declared she hated Lady Emily, and that she would rather go back to Paris and be a pupil teacher at the old school than stay here and be snubbed by my customers. The child doesn't understand the Sanatorium," added Lambert, with a faint smile. "I believe she thinks my position is like that of a publican who serves out beer in pewter pots, and fancies I want to make her into a barmaid."

"I think she is hurt at not having been in your confidence, and she does not like the idea of Lady Emily being at the head of things."

"She went into a passion the moment I mentioned Lady Emily," said the much tried father, "and declared she would never speak to her if she stayed here for years. The next moment she said she should go back to Paris in the morning. You see, doctor, she is only a child, and being all I have left, I have spoilt her all her life."

The gong sounded, and Niel followed his employer to the grand drawing-room—a spacious apartment, where about fifty people were assembled. A very graceful woman, attired in black silk, with a tiny cap over her luxuriant hair, came forward, and Mr. Lambert introduced her to the doctor as Lady Emily Jendal.

"Will you take me in to dinner?" she said to Niel, frankly, "there is a great deal I want to ask you about."

The dinner passed off well, as a perfectly served repast must always do with well-bred, cheerful people.

There was nothing in the conversation to denote that the guests gathered round Mr. Lambert's table had paid for the privilege of sitting there.

Only one thing marred the tasteful scene—one empty place at the host's left hand was vacant. Niel could just see this, and guessed it had been meant for Hilda. Lady Emily soon introduced her name.

"I think you travelled with Miss Lambert, Dr. Walney?" she began in a low tone.

"Yes. I am afraid her unexpected arrival has been rather unfortunate."

"I knew she was expected next month," said Lady Emily, gently; "but Mr. Lambert has rarely spoken of her—even to me, and most people believe he is a bachelor."

"She had not the faintest idea of—of Bedford Hall. She thought, poor child, she was coming to a quiet, private house, where she would be all the world to her father."

"I always thought it was a pity Mr. Lambert did not tell her," said the Lady Resident, quietly. "Mysteries never answer."

Dr. Walney knew the last shot had hit home, but he kept the talk on Hilda.

"Miss Lambert seems to think—poor little thing!—people will look down on her. She compares her father's position with that of a country publican."

Lady Emily laughed. She really could not help it.

"She will soon understand, but I wish I knew what to do for her. I would go to her to-night, only I hear she positively desired to to be alone."

"I am afraid, Lady Emily, said Niel, frankly, "you are the chief object of her ire. She seems to imagine you order Mr. Lambert's dinners and see to his little comforts, and she grudges you the privilege."

Lady Emily had no false prudery. She was a refined gentlewoman, but if plain speaking was required she did not shrink from it.

"The foolish child is not by any chance jealous of me, I hope?" she said, anxiously. "School girls put up all sorts of romantic notions. Surely——"

She paused, and Niel helped her out.

"That is just it, Lady Emily. Little Miss Lambert, the moment she heard the groom refer to you, took up the notion that her father had married in her absence, and you were her stepmother. It seems her schoolfellows tease her by declaring there must be some reason for her father's refusing to let her come home in the holidays. She conjured up visions of a second wife and family, and the groom's unlucky remark that 'he had had no orders about her from Lady Emily' finished the mischief."

"Well," said the widow, cheerfully, "she will soon find out her mistake, but I feel sorry for Mr. Lambert. He had thought so much of her coming home, and now he looks worried to death."

After dinner the new doctor made many acquaintances among the guests, and one of them—pretty blooming Lady Ainslie—told him frankly she was sure they had met before.

"Your voice is quite familiar to me, Dr. Walney, though I can't recollect in the least where it was I knew you."

"In Germany, perhaps. I spent several years there," said Niel, feeling uncomfortable.

She shook her head.

"I have never been to Germany. I am Moorshire born and bred. I had hardly been out of the county till I married."

"You were the Bishop's daughter, I think?"

"I am," she corrected, smiling. "Papa is well and hearty still. He is coming over here to-morrow. He is very fond of this place. We were among the first guests at Bedford Hall."

"And I met her here," put in Sir Gerald, pleasantly. "I always say I owe my wife to Mr. Lambert. What's this I hear about his daughter?"

Niel explained as far as he could. Sir Gerald laughed.

"What a foolish child! You'd better take her in hand, Elsie."

"I rather think I shall," said Lady Ainslie, quietly. "What is she like, Dr. Walney?"

"Remarkably pretty."

"And—presentable?"

"Most distinctly so. She might be a little wandering princess from her appearance."

"Ah!" reflected Elsie, sagely, "one never can believe Charlotte Castleton, she is so spiteful. She told me she met Miss Lambert on the stairs and she looked an overgrown, underbred school-girl."

"Miss Castleton is severe."

"She always was," said Lady Ainslie, coolly. "I have known her all my life, and I have a vivid remembrance of the awe in which we children held her when she came with her mother to the Palace. She was much older than any of us, and she tyrannized over us dreadfully."

"I have been looking for Lady Castleton. I hear she is to be one of my patients?"

"If you want to cure her," said Elsie, wickedly, "you must order her on a long sea voyage. Nothing else will free her from Charlotte. She clings to her brother and his wife like the old man of the sea; but she is a dreadfully bad sailor, and would not dream of undertaking a yatching tour."

"I shall remember your advice."

Hilda Lambert cried herself to sleep. All her brilliant visions faded. She had meant to be all the world to her father, and, lo, he had heaps of new friends, and wanted none of her, or she thought so.

But at eighteen a night's sleep makes all the difference in one's feelings, and Hilda awoke with a less hopeless view of things. She could keep her own rooms and never see any of these horrid people. She could walk and read and practice by herself, and perhaps of an evening her father would come and sit with her. It was not a very brilliant prospect, but it was better than running away.

Miss Lambert liked being waited on, and she did not refuse the aid of the neat maid who came to help her dress, and who seemed to take a pleasure in piling up the golden brown hair on the pretty head. She chose a dress of pale lilac cambric trimmed with lace, a dress which simplicity itself had yet been work of a Parisian modiste, and then she went into the pretty little sitting-room, which opened from the bedroom and informed Mary she should like her breakfast.

"Breakfast is at nine, miss," said Mary, respectfully, "do you mean you would like anything first?"

"Oh, I shall not go down to breakfast—you can bring me something here."

Ten minutes later a knock came at the door, and when Hilda cried, "Come in," there entered, not Mary and the breakfast, but a pretty, dainty young matron, leading a chubby boy of three.

"Good morning, Miss Lambert," said Lady Ainslie, cheerfully. "I have come to ask you to go down to breakfast with me. This is my

little son, we have stayed at Bedford Hall over a dozen times, and Mr. Lambert is an old friend of ours."

Hilda looked blank.

"Are you Lady Emily?" she asked, gravely.

"No," replied Elsie. "I am not. When I came here first I was a girl of eighteen. I met my husband here, and Mr. Lambert came to our wedding. We have always called this a kind of second home, and when I heard things had not gone quite smoothly on your account, I came to see if I could not reconcile you to your home."

"You are very kind," doubtfully.

"Little girl," said Elsie, "don't quarrel with your happiness. You have one of the most devoted fathers I ever met. All these years he has toiled to gather up a fortune for you, surely you won't spoil his satisfaction in his wealth because of your foolish pride?"

Hilda was crying.

"I thought people would look down on me, and father would alway be busy with Lady Emily, and not have any time for me!"

"No one will look down on you, and I am quite sure Mr. Lambert will keep plenty of time for you, and now, will you come with me to breakfast, it is only the first plunge that is terrible?"

A nurse claimed Elsie's son and heir, and the two ladies went down to breakfast. Hilda's place was between Lady Ainslie and Dr. Walney, Sir Gerald was on his wife's other side, and all these exerted themselves to make things pleasant for Hilda, and before the meal was over Miss Lambert began to feel life at Bedford Hall might not be such a bad affair after all.

The meeting with Lady Emily went off better than could have been expected. With all her wilfulness Hilda was a good judge of character, and she knew after five minutes of the widow's conversation that she was just what she seemed, a kind, thoughtful friend to Mr. Lambert with a regard for his interests, but without the slightest wish to be anything more.

As for the visitors at Bedford Hall, they "took to" Hilda at once. The girl was so fresh and charming, so naive and fascinating, that she made an extra attraction to a place which even before her coming had been full of delights. Gentle Mrs. Graham, who came over with the Bishop for a week, invited Hilda to stay at the palace, and told the girl frankly, she ought to be proud of her father.

"He came here seven years ago after a very popular family, and everyone in the county was opposed to the idea of a Sanitorium in our midst. He has fought his way in the teeth of opposition until to-day he is one of the most influential men in Moorshire, while the Hall has been a blessing to more people than one can count."

"Dad is very good," admitted Hilda, "but the Hall is not like home. I feel more as though I lived in some continually changing panorama than my own life. It is all so strange."

Mrs. Graham felt there was truth in Hilda's lament. She did not tell the girl her father would probably retire because she could not imagine Mr. Lambert away from Bedford Hall; but she pointed out, frankly, that very probably Moorshire would not long be her home.

"My dear, don't you see you are sure to marry. In the nature of things Mr. Lambert cannot expect to keep you many years. When you have left him for a husband's home, you will like to think of him as happy in the undertaking he has made such a success."

Hilda looked up into Mrs. Graham's face with a wistful smile.

"I shall never marry."

"All girls say that," replied Mrs. Graham, in no wise dismayed by the announcement, "till the right person comes."

"He will never come for me."

"My dear child, why? Young, beautiful, and accomplished, why should you not be loved?"

"Because," the words came slowly, reluctantly, almost as though dragged from her, "because I am a nobody!"

Mrs. Graham felt perplexed.

"You are the daughter of one of the richest men in the county," she replied. "I don't see that you can describe yourself as a nobody!"

"Do you know Mr. Leputon?" asked Hilda. "He was staying at the Hall when I first came home."

"I know him very well, and pity him. Poor man! he has twelve children and two hundred a year. It is one of the things I like so much about your father, Hilda, that instead of a resident chaplain he invites the Hamerton curates to take the duty for the season."

"Well," said Hilda, quietly, "Mr. Leputon was talking to a lady. It was the first night I had appeared in the drawing-room, and I daresay they did not know I was so near. I wasn't listening, but I simply couldn't help hearing, because I was hedged in by a flower stand and could not move."

"And what did you hear?"

"The lady asked him if he had seen 'Miss Lambert,' and he said yes, and that I seemed a pretty little thing. 'It's absurd having her here,' replied the lady, 'for no gentleman would care to marry a girl in her position. The daughter of a mere nobody!' Then Mr. Leputon replied, 'Unless he was poor, and her father's wealth was a temptation!'"

"And you let this trouble you, Hilda?"

"How could I help it," cried the girl, indignantly. "If the man my father had befriended could think of me so basely, what will other people think? I shall never marry, Mrs. Graham. No rich man would marry a nobody, and if a suitor were poor I should always remember Mr. Leputon's idea."

"Well, child, you are very foolish if you let Miss Castleton's malice hurt you."

"Miss Castleton! How could you guess?"

"She is the most spiteful woman in the county, and—I despise him for it—I know Mr. Leputon would agree with any of her opinions just now, because the Vicar of Castleton is turned eighty, and he is hoping her brother will offer the living to him when it becomes vacant."

"And will he?"

"I have no idea! Hilda, promise me you won't let Charlotte Castleton worry you."

"She ignores me utterly. I am not worthy of her conversation."

"Ah, but I meant the recollection of what you overheard! Charlotte spoils her own life, and she has gone about trying to spoil other people's ever since!"

"Do you mean she had a love story?"

"She was engaged to one of the nicest men I ever knew, Denzil Alwyn, the heir of Alwyn Grange. When he discovered his father's liabilities, he joined with Sir Bryan to cut off the entail, and Charlotte jilted him. Your father bought the estate, and changed its name; but for months and years the Alwyns have been remembered in Moorshire."

"What became of them?"

"For years nothing was heard of them, but Mr. Vesey, our lawyer, declares that travelling on the continent last summer he fell in with an old friend of Sir Bryan's, who told him the Baronet died within a few months of leaving here, and that his son never assumed the title, thinking it incongruous with his position as a struggling literary hack."

"How sad it sounds."

"Aye, there were two other men admirers of Miss Castleton in those days, but when they heard how she had treated Denzil Alwyn they were disenchanted, and made no efforts to succeed to his place as her *fiancée*. She will never marry now, and as she is entirely dependent on her brother, her position is not enviable."

"I can't bear her."

"Neither can I," confessed the Bishop's wife; "but, little girl, it does not do to express our feelings quite so plainly."

"She is horrid to her sister-in-law," explained Hilda, half in self defence, "and she says such nasty things to Dr. Walney. She told someone last night he was only an upper servant, and I am sure he heard her."

"The Bishop likes Dr. Walney very much, and so does Elsie."

"I think Lady Ainslie likes everyone, she is so kind and good."

"She is very happy herself, and so wishes other people to be happy too. She had the strangest fancy about Dr. Walney—she declared he reminded her of poor Denzil Alwyn!"

"Dr. Walney has a good face, but it is very sad," said Hilda, dreamily. "The first time I ever saw him I thought he was quite old. He only looks young when he smiles."

"And that is not often, I expect? Perhaps he has had a great deal of trouble. He told me himself that he was quite alone in the world."

CHAPTER IV.

JULY had faded into August. The latter month had given place to September, and yet the Castletons lingered at Bedford Hall. All the other people who had been there when Hilda arrived had long since departed.

It seemed hard to the girl that the only person she disliked should make such an unusually protracted stay.

The truth was, Lord Castleton, who was devoted to his wife, fancied she derived benefit from Dr. Walney's skill, and wished to continue under his care.

The gentle Viscountess herself was only too glad to linger, when the presence of other people saved her from much intercourse with her uncongenial sister-in-law; and Charlotte might worry and urge Castleton was going to ruin without them.

Clive had a will of his own, and he paid no attention to her complaints.

Unfortunately, the Honourable Charlotte was so accustomed to interfere with other people, that she could not desist from her favourite pursuit.

The chief objects of her dislike at present were Hilda Lambert and the resident surgeon. The first because her dazzling girlish freshness was such a contrast to the spinster's *passé* charms; the other because he reminded her of her former lover, Denzil Alwyn.

She had a reason—known only to herself—which made her feel angry whenever she thought of her rupture with Denzil. It had been one fatal mistake of her life. Not only had she felt more affection for him than she had ever felt since for any human creature, but the way she treated him had prejudiced everyone against her, and she knew—within eighteen months of jilting him—that had she only been true to her promised word, she would have enjoyed, as his wife, a position worthy her rank and unlimited wealth. Truly, the Honourable Charlotte had managed badly.

It was strange that, one evening in the drawing-room, the conversation fell on the Alwyns. Usually the subject was avoided, for people thought it a bad compliment to Mr. Lambert to talk of his predecessors; but on this special night a family who had once lived in Moorshire, but removed years before, had arrived at the Hall, and Mrs. Montressor said openly to Hilda's father how tremendously he had improved the property.

"But, do you know," said the old lady, gravely, "we almost dreaded coming here. The Alwyns were such great friends of ours, I was afraid the place would be full of painful memories."

"Did you keep up any correspondence with Sir Byran?" asked Mr. Lambert, in a tone of real interest. "I have a special reason for wishing to know his address."

"They never wrote to me," she said, sadly,

"They might have known the General and I were not fair weather friends to shun them at the first breath of adversity, but then I can't blame them. Goodness knows they had little reason to trust their fellow creatures."

By accident or design she looked at Charlotte Castleton. That lady, whose conscience made her peculiarly sensitive on this point, felt sure Mrs. Montressor alluded to her jilting Denzil.

"The Alwyns behaved very foolishly," said this amiable virgin. "If they had not vanished like fugitives something might have been done for them."

"Don't talk like that, Charlotte," reproved her brother. "You speak as though one could have insulted them by offers of pecuniary assistance. There was something terribly sad in the way they chose to disappear, but I can understand their feeling."

"All the same, it was very foolish," retorted Charlotte. "If Mr. Alwyn had only had the sense to leave his address behind him two years after he left the Grange he would have been a rich man."

"I only wish I could find him now," said Mr. Lambert, feelingly.

"Why, papa?" demanded Hilda.

"Because, child, when the property changed hands by an oversight of the lawyer's I was asked two thousand pounds less than Sir Bryan had desired. I paid what I was asked, and he accepted the money, so legally there was an end of it. But I should have gone to the higher figure had the matter been put to me, and when Bedford Hall became a success I invested that extra two thousand, meaning to restore it to the Alwyns if I ever got the chance. It has gone on accumulating at compound interest, and it's a nice little nest egg now. I shall never touch it, for it seems to me properly Sir Bryan's or his son's."

Lord Castleton flashed a glance of admiration at the speaker. The simple, rugged honesty of Peter Lambert's nature pleased him.

"You may make your mind easy, Mr. Lambert," said Charlotte, cuttingly. "The Alwyns will never claim that money. They have been dead for years."

"It seems to me, Miss Castleton," said General Montressor, gravely, "that you must know more than the rest of the world about our friends. You have made two astonishing assertions respecting them already. First, that Denzil would have been a rich man had he left his address behind him; next, that he and his father are both dead."

"I can explain my sister's first allusion," said Lord Castleton, coming to her rescue, which was more than she deserved. "About eighteen months after the Grange changed hands I received a letter from a gentleman in America, a Mr. Charteris, the only brother of the late Lady Alwyn. He wrote to beg me—as his nephew's friend—to send him Denzil's address. He had made an enormous fortune, and hearing of the evil days that had fallen upon the Alwyns he wanted them both to join him in the new world. He was a childless man, and hoped to make Denzil his heir."

"What a chance!" cried the General.

"Yes, but what could I do? I had not the faintest clue to the Alwyns' abode, and I could only write and say so. Mr. Charteris sent me one other letter saying he was coming to England to search for his relations personally. He gave me an address which would always find him, Briarley Hall, Surrey, and begged me to communicate with him there if I heard of the Alwyns."

"And Mr. Charteris never found them?" said Charlotte, bitterly. "So you see I was not mistaken, and they are dead."

Dr. Walney spoke for the first time.

"Is Mr. Charteris in England still?"

"Yes," replied Lord Castleton, "he has bought Briarley and settled down in Surrey. A very pleasant fellow he is. I stayed with him once for a few days."

"He comes of a very good family," said Charlotte, amiably, "though he did make a fortune in trade. You seem interested in him, Dr. Walney? Were you thinking of personating his long-lost nephew? There are people you know who say you resemble Denzil Alwyn."

You might have heard a pin drop as she launched this taunt. Often of late years had poor Castleton blushed for his sister, but never had he felt more ashamed of her than now. Everyone sympathised with the young doctor.

Peter Lambert laid one hand impulsively on Niel's shoulder and said, quietly,—

"Mr. Charteris might seek far without finding a nephew to equal my friend Dr. Walney. There are some jests, Miss Castleton, which are ill-timed."

The Viscount was ready with his support.

"I don't think Dr. Walney will fancy we wish to lose him," he said, courteously, "he seems to me one of the acquisitions of the Hall. He will forgive me for saying that his resemblance to Denzil Alwyn is remarkable. Often when I hear his voice I could fancy my lost friend has returned to life."

Hilda said nothing. She was sitting on her father's other side, and when Miss Castleton made her spiteful suggestion the girl doubled up her little fist as though she would like to shake it at Charlotte.

Hours were early at the Hall as became a sanitorium. The ladies retired soon after ten and by eleven all the sitting-rooms were deserted except that devoted to smokers. Niel did not feel inclined for their company that night, and when Mr. Lambert released him from a long task, he turned in the direction of his own apartments.

To reach them from the part of the house where he was he had to pass the picture gallery—a long winding corridor, little traversed after dark. To his surprise as he entered it he saw in the distance the glimmer of a faint light. Walking quickly in the direction from which it came he saw Hilda Lambert carrying a small silver lamp. She still wore her white dinner gown and she stood in wrapt contemplation before the picture of Denzil Alwyn. Suddenly turning her head she caught sight of Dr. Walney."

"Are you verifying Miss Casterton's assertion?" he asked her pleasantly, "Miss Lambert, do you think I resemble this picture sufficiently to pass myself off to Mr. Charteris as the original?"

"It was wicked of her to say it."

"I am afraid I am not a favourite with Miss Castleton," said Niel, drily, "but you have not answered my question?"

"I cannot!"

Why?"

The child raised her star-like eyes to his face, and looked at him reproachfully.

"Because I know the truth! You are Denzil Alwyn himself!"

The doctor started. He made no attempt to deny the charge, but he looked with a strange tenderness at the little speaker.

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't think—I am sure!"

"Tell me your reasons."

"There are so many," said Hilda, dreamily. "I believe I thought of it first when Mrs. Graham told me the story of Sir Bryan's misfortune, but there are other things. You always knew your way through the passages of the Hall, and now and again you have spoken as though you loved the place. Then, when Mr. Vesey came to dinner, you made an excuse and did not meet him, and, oh!—Miss Castleton hates you. People always hate those they have injured, and she had injured Denzil Alwyn!"

"You have not told your father—Hilda?"

"I shall never tell anyone," she answered, simply. "I can understand it all. When Sir Bryan died you wanted to hide yourself from old friends, so you changed your name, Walney is only Alwyn transposed, and studied to be a doctor, and then I expect you grew to long to see your old home, and then Dad wanted help, you thought it was safe—and you came."

"That is not all," he said, sadly. "I had tried life's battle and failed. I had started in private practice, and no patients came. I was at my wits' end when Dr. Burnside's cousin, Jack Nairn, told me of this opening."

Hilda nodded her head, gravely.

"And you will stay with us. Dad likes you, so does everyone except Miss Castleton, and I—I will keep your secret."

The man who called himself a woman hater, and who had come to Bedford Hall with a profound contempt for the whole sex, felt his eyes grow dim with a mist of hushed tears, as he looked at this beautiful child, and answered, sadly,—

"I cannot stay here, dear."

"Why not?"

"Because your father trusts me, and if I stayed here I might betray that trust."

"You couldn't."

"I should! Mr. Lambert is a rich man, and you are his heiress. What would he think if a penniless doctor asked him for his only child?"

"But——"

"It would come to that, my darling," answered the strong man, sadly. "I tried to think it was only 'friendship,' that I only cared for you because your fresh, innocent nature was such a contrast to my weary world tossed one; but, Hilda, I know the truth now. I love you with all my heart. Love you far more passionately than years ago I loved Charlotte Castleton; but I dare not plead for your affection. I am poor and you are rich, so there is nothing for it but 'good-bye!'"

"I don't believe you care for me a bit!"

He smiled.

"Better so perhaps, because you won't know what it costs me to leave you."

"Dad is not mercenary."

"But I am proud. I could not receive all and give nothing in return. Even my name I have laid down. I renounced it by my father's coffin, and took an oath never to call myself Sir Denzil Alwyn until I had won my way to fortune!"

Hilda turned to him a sweet, pleading face.

"Promise me one thing," she said, wistfully, "that you will not go till you have been here three months."

"Why?"

"Because, if you made an excuse and went suddenly, everyone would think it was because of what Miss Castleton said to night, and she would be so triumphant."

"It is dangerous to stay," he urged, gravely, "child, love like mine won't bear trifling with. The more I am with you, the fiercer pain to give you up."

"And I never thought anyone would ever love me," came from Hilda, with a sigh. "You see, I thought no one nice would ever care for a poor little nobody!"

Denzil raised her hand, and pressed it passionately to his lips, then he turned without a word, leaving his little love still contemplating the picture which had been painted when he was the heir of Alwyn Grange.

And considering she had just parted from the man she loved after hearing him declare he must give her up, Hilda's conduct was certainly passing strange.

There was a look of unusual brightness on her face as she went to her own room, and then dismissing her maid, she sat down to her davenport and began to write.

Hours passed, many sheets of paper were ruined before the little heiress accomplished a letter which satisfied her.

Her sixth attempt was folded up, placed in an envelope, and sealed all ready for post just as the great stable clock struck three, and weary, yet with a delicious sense of happiness, Hilda crept into bed.

CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

Geoffery Charteris had been much attached to his sister, Lady Alwyn, and the

strange disappearance of her husband and son was a real grief to him; but there was a great fund of hopefulness in his disposition, and he always asserted Denzil would "turn up" some day.

"And if he doesn't in my time, Grace," he would say to his wife, "I can trust you to see to the lad. We have buried our own children, dear, all your kindred are left behind in a New York cemetery, and Denzil is the very last of my flesh and blood, it's only right he should be my heir."

And "Grace," who was the dearest of silvery-haired old ladies, always agreed with her husband, and expressed herself convinced they should hear of his nephew some day.

A simpler pair than the old couple could not have been found. Mr. Charteris was worth twenty thousand a-year; but he lived in complete retirement, visiting his country neighbours without ceremony, but avoiding balls, dinner parties, and such like gaiety, which he said disagreed with a man in his "seventies."

He kept a horse for himself and a carriage for his wife. The gardens were well kept up, but within doors he preferred to be waited on only by women servants, and so neither butler nor page adorned the household at Briarley Hall.

And two mornings after Denzil's virtuous renunciation of his love dream, Mr. Charteris, coming down to breakfast, found a letter among his correspondence, which changed the whole current of his thoughts, and filled his mind with thanksgiving.

"Grace, my dear!" he exclaimed eagerly, "he is found at last! Read this."

"Dear Sir,—If you still wish to know the address of your nephew, Sir Denzil Alwyn, I can give it you. He is now staying at Bedford Hall as medical resident. When his father died, he took a vow never to claim his own name and fortune until he had made a position for himself. He studied under the name of Niel Walney, and now he is Dr. Walney. He can never write to you because of his vow, but I found out from little things that he knew our house very well, and when people remarked on his likeness to the Alwyns, I seemed to guess everything.

"In case you do not know it, Bedford Hall is Alwyn Grange with a new name. My father bought it and turned it into a Sanatorium. Dr. Walney would be very angry if he knew I was writing, but I think he would be glad to see someone who loved his parents. —I am, yours faithfully,

"Hilda Lambert"

"Medical attendant in the place where his father lived, poor, dear lad!"

"You must go at once, Geoff."

"And you too, my dear! Let's both go on a visit to Bedford Hall. We can settle the rest afterwards."

"And, Geoff, don't tell anyone until you have spoken to your nephew himself."

"Why?"

Mrs. Charteris hesitated.

"We heard long ago Miss Castleton jilted poor Denzil. She is unmarried still, and if she heard of his good fortune before he knew of it himself, she might——"

"Work on his feelings by being amiable to him in poverty. I see, Grace. You think then it is good fortune?"

Mrs. Charteris smiled.

"He must come to us, Geoff. It will all be his when we are gone, and someone young about the place will brighten us up."

"By the way, who is Hilda Lambert?"

Mrs. Charteris looked very wise.

"I shouldn't wonder if when Denzil took back his old name, he wanted her to become Lady Alwyn."

"My dear Grace! she doesn't say so."

"She couldn't in writing to a stranger," said Mrs. Charteris, warmly; "but you can read between the lines of her letter, and I am pretty sure she is in love with Denzil."

"Shall I write to her?"

"Yes; just a line to say you thank her for her letter, and we are coming to the Hall as soon as we can have rooms."

* * * * *

"Dr. Walney, some new visitors have arrived," said Lady Emily a week later, meeting the medical resident in one of the long corridors, "and they want particularly to see you before dinner if it's convenient to you."

"I'll go now. What name did you say?"

But Lady Emily either purposely or by accident ignored his question.

"I have given them No. 17 rooms—those opposite to Lady Castleton's. I don't think there is much the matter, only they were so urgent about seeing you."

Even when he reached the sitting-room, Niel Walney suspected nothing. He thought the two old people rather peculiar, for the lady made some excuse the moment he entered, and bolted—there was no other word to describe the abruptness of her exit—and the old gentleman blew his nose rather loudly, and asked Niel what he meant by it.

"He must be deaf," thought Dr. Walney, aloud.

"You wished to see me? I am the resident physician, and——"

"Not a bit of it," contradicted the old gentleman, with a twinkle in his eye. "You are my nephew, Denzil Alwyn, and a pretty hunt you have given me all these years."

Denial was impossible. Denzil wrung the hand offered him, and said nothing.

"You are your mother's image," said Mr. Charteris. "Why in the world didn't you write to me, lad, when things went wrong?"

"You know the Alwyn failing, sir—pride, I fancy, that explains all."

"Well, you must leave here at once," declared Uncle Geoffrey. "Your aunt and I have come to take you back with us to Briarley Hall, and if you can't be happy without physicking someone, you can doctor the villagers for nothing."

"But——"

"We have been looking for you these five years," interrupted Mr. Charteris. "The old lady and I have planned every thing. I shall settle two thousand a-year on you at once for life, and when we are dead everything else will come to you. We have lost our own children, Denzil, and we look to you to bring a little brightness into our old age."

"I don't think I am a very bright person," said Denzil, simply. "These last years have almost crushed hope out of me."

"It will come back," declared Mrs. Charteris, who had joined them. "I can't think how you could bear the pain of coming here, Denzil, to see your own old home another's."

Denzil smiled wistfully.

"I was too thankful to get a chance of earning my living, and, Aunt Grace, I have been in a measure happy here. In spite of past memories, I like Bedford Hall."

Mrs. Charteris looked at him, keenly.

"Does Miss Castleton being at the Hall make its charm?"

He laughed.

"Oh, you have heard of that! She hates Dr. Walney intensely, and is always trying to snub the poor man, and keep him in his proper place."

"Ah!"

"But who told you I was here?" asked Sir Denzil, when he had time to realize how strange their appearance was.

The old gentleman smiled.

"I've passed my word not to betray her; but, my boy, be sure of this. It was no one who bore you any ill will."

That evening Peter Lambert was closeted with Dr. Walney, and Mr. Charteris. His surprise at finding his "Medical Resident" was Sir Denzil Alwyn, erstwhile heir of this fair estate was great and unfeigned, but when Sir Denzil went on to ask consent to pay his addresses to Hilda, and Mr. Charteris expressed his intention of settling an ample income upon his nephew, the worthy owner of Bedford Hall fairly started.

"I always liked you, doctor," he said, earnestly to Sir Denzil, "and if you had asked me for Hilda when you were only my medical resident I would have given her to you gladly, but I won't deny that though I'm a homely, self made man myself I should dearly like to see Hilda with a title. If she becomes Lady Alwyn I shall be a proud father—but I'm pretty sure she won't,"

"Will you tell me why?"

"Because she has made up her mind never to marry anyone, and from a little child Hilda always meant what she said."

"May I try and persuade her to change her mind?" asked Sir Alwyn.

It was strange that he should seek her in the picture gallery. Stranger still that he should find her as he had left her the ten days before by his own portrait.

Their eyes met. He spoke no word, only opened his arms and gathered her to his heart, and Hilda rested there without a struggle, she seemed to feel she had found her real home at last.

"And so you resolved to make me rich sweetheart?" he whispered, "but, Hilda, I care nothing for wealth unless I have you."

"You have always been my prince," she whispered, "from the first time we met; but, oh, Niel, what will Miss Castleton say?"

Sir Denzil felt unable to cope with that question. He kissed his pretty little *fiancée* again, and told her just a little of the weary struggle he had had all these long years.

And as they stood thus, her head on his shoulder, his arm round her waist. Far too engrossed with each other to notice the sound of footsteps, the click-clack of a high-heeled shoe came nearer and nearer, and at last a voice full of indignation recalled them to the nether world.

"Dr. Walney—Miss Lambert! I am horrified! Pray, does Mr. Lambert know of your clandestine meetings? I shall make it my duty to inform him to-night."

"Pray do," said the ex-doctor, courteously. "But you will find yourself forestalled. Mr. Lambert has already given his consent to my union with his daughter."

"He must be in his dotage not to see that a penniless adventurer must be attracted by her fortune."

She had gone too far. Hilda turned and faced her, and said, coldly,—

"It is best to be certain of one's facts before speaking. You once said in my presence, Miss Castleton, that nobody but a fortune-hunter would marry a nobody like me. I have much pleasure in correcting your mistake. This gentleman"—with a slight inclination of her head towards him—"is the nephew and heir of Mr. Charteris, of Briarley Hall; but I loved him just the same when he was only a hardworking doctor as now that he is the wealthy Sir Denzil Alwyn."

"Then he has personated Denzil? I said he would," said Miss Castleton, bitterly.

The Baronet turned to her very gravely.

"I can forgive you now, because with a new love, happiness has dawned for me. But, Miss Castleton, don't try me too far, or I may prove to you not only that I am Denzil Alwyn, but the man you threw over like a discarded glove when he lost his fortune!"

Charlotte Castleton turned white to her very lips. Sir Denzil gave his arm to his sweetheart and led her down to the grand drawing-room, where Mr. Charteris had already explained the wonderful story, and everyone was ready with kindly congratulation for the future Lady Alwyn.

* * * * *

They were married on Christmas Eve, and the bride wore a wreath of bright red holly instead of the far-famed orange blossoms, though she carried a bouquet of the latter flowers.

Mr. Lambert gave away his daughter, and wanted very much to give away his estate as well, but this Sir Denzil resolutely declined.

"I won't have you undo your wonderful work," he said, warmly. "I think you have

made of my old home a veritable palace of delight. Long may it remain so, long may people repeat, as many have said to me, that their happiest days have been spent at BEDFORD HALL."

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

WOMAN conceals only what she does not know.

FRIENDSHIP between women is only a suspension of hostilities.

UGLY LADY: "Every word that comes out of your mouth is a lie." Servant: "That's so, fair lady."

THERE is never any difficulty in finding people to play the first fiddle, but, oh, how hard it is to get the rest of the orchestra.

LITTLE darling (hugging and kissing father, who is a hirsute individual): "Oh, farder, what a lot of fedders you've got."

FOND PAPA: "I've brought you home a pug, my dear." Enraptured Daughter: "Oh, you dear, good papa; it's just like you!"

"DOES your wife ever let you——" "No." "You had better wait till I finish my question, hadn't you?" "Oh, it's quite a safe answer, whatever your question may be."

A.: "Brownson gives the lie to the saying that no man is a hero to his valet." B.: How does he manage it?" A.: "He is his own valet."

"BROWNSON is very ill. He's got to have his teeth extracted." "What are you talking about? Brownson's teeth are all false." "I know. He swallowed 'em."

MISTRESS (to applicant for cook's position): "Why did you leave your last place?" Applicant: "You are very inquisitive, marm. I didn't ask yer what for yer last cook left you."

LADY of the house (consulting card in her hand): "You a singing-master! But we do not want a singing-master!" Herr Pumpernickle: "Bardon; de lady next door toldt me vou vanted von badly; she sent me!"

"TRY to remember this: Milton, the poet, was blind. Do you think you can remember it?" inquired the teacher. "Yes, ma'am." "Now, what was Milton's great misfortune?" "He was a poet."

A LITTLE five-year-old, whose C's were like T's, was sent to the grocer's for some coffee, which made the grocer ask what kind of stuff it was, to which the boy replied, "It's tuff me muvver make tea wi."

WILLIE (scared): "Now we've milked the cow, what'll we do? Pop'll be awful mad." Jimmie (equal to the occasion): "We'll drive her down to the pond and fill her up with water."

"Do you think you could tell the difference between a kleptomaniac and a shop-lifter?" "That's easy," said the would-be floor-walker. "The shop-lifter is unable to pay double price for the goods, if detected."

"WELL, Harris, did you call on Maud's father?" "I did." "How did you come out?" "I've been trying to remember. It was all so sudden. I don't know whether it was by the window or down the stairs."

POET: "Two weeks ago I sent a poem and enclosed a stamp for approval." Editor: "Yes, I remember. We approved of the stamp. It was a daisy. I don't remember the poem."

IT DID.—"After all," soliloquized the good woman of the house, as she looked through her costly array of souvenir spoons before putting them away for the night, "does it pay to collect them?" "It does," softly whispered the burglar to himself, as he came out from his hiding place shortly afterward and bagged the entire collection.

"ONE thing I like about our new man," said a member of the firm to his partner, "is that he's reliable. You can always tell what he is going to do next." "And what is that?" "Nothing."

GLADYS: "How touching it is, Horace! How pathetic!" Horace: "Yes. It's painful. There are thirty-seven of them." "I was speaking of the music, Horace." "Oh, I was counting the bald heads in the front row."

FEMININE ARITHMETIC.—Little Innocent: "Oh, no, Mr. Sparks, I couldn't think of it. I, only sixteen years old, marry you, thirty-two years old. Why, you are twice my age. Just think of it, when I'm thirty years old, you'll be sixty.

YOUNG MISTRESS: "I don't see why you should leave me so suddenly. I'm sure I've done all I could to help you with the housework, and I have done all the cooking." Maid: "Yes'm, that's what the matter." "What is?" "I can't stand y'r cooking."

A POINT IN HIS FAVOUR.—Jaysmith: "I'm going to sue the *Howler* for libel. It called me a thief." McWatty: "But papers are allowed to print the news, you know." "But that isn't news." "True enough. Everybody knows it now."

RICH WIDOW: "I can't keep a servant girl in the house. I have sent away six or seven already. They all fall in love with my handsome coachman." Gentleman Friend: "Then why don't you send the coachman away?" A painful but significant silence ensued.

DEBROWN (calling on friend): "Why, hello, Jonjones, I expected to find you dead. I thought you intended to commit suicide to-day?" Jonjones: "So I did, but I'm not feeling very well, to-day, so I've put it off for a few days."

DRAPER: "We must do something to sell these goods." Assistant: "Yes; they are going slowly. What would you suggest?" Draper: "Mark them 10 per cent. higher, and label them 'damaged remnants,' and they'll be sold out to-day."

QUIDNUNC: "How is it that I never see you give the conductor a ticket?" Thrifty: "Why, when he comes to me I always say 'Pass.'" "Why, how do you get a pass?" "Oh, I haven't any, I simply mean for him to pass."

FEMALE EMANCIPATOR: "With all our work, the cause of woman does not progress. Why is it?" Male Philosopher: "The trouble is that the pretty girls spend all their time trying to be brainy, and the brainy girls spend all their time trying to look pretty."

"ROBIN is a very fine violinist." He is indeed; but there is something strange about his musical ability." "There is?" "Yes; he plays first fiddle in the orchestra, but plays second fiddle at home, and his wife isn't much of a musician either."

"Do you warrant this bicycle to be gentle?" "I don't understand you, sir." "I want to know about its habits. The last bicycle I had not only threw me, but whirled about as I struck the ground and jumped all over me."

HER FATHER: "So young man, you want to marry my daughter?" Young Man: "Yes, sir." Her Father: "Well, what are your expectations?" Young Man: "That you will not give your consent, and that we shall have to get married without."

"MY DEAR," said the absent-minded professor, on entering the breakfast room, "don't alarm yourself, but a slight palsy has manifested itself in my left foot. In spite of the fact that the glass is below zero, my right foot rejoices in more than normal warmth, whereas the left is quite rigid and stiff, and cold as ice." Upon the advice of the family doctor, who was sent for without delay, the professor was put to bed, when it was discovered that he had two socks upon his right foot, while the left was entirely unprotected.

DOCTOR: "From the condition of your hand and arm, I should say you are suffering from writers' cramp—too much exercise of one set of muscles." Young Business Man: "But I never write. I employ a type-writer." "Um—engaged to her?" "Y-e-s." "Do your—er—dictating with your other arm."

MAGISTRATE (to prisoner): "I see that this is the thirteenth time you have made your appearance at this court; you seem quite incorrigible." Prisoner: "I really can't help it, yer honour; I am sorry to trouble you so often, but there ain't another court in the vicinity."

CONFIRMED BACHELOR.—"How times does fly, Miss Seaside! Why, it was ten years ago that you refused me on this spot." Miss Seaside (who wishes she hadn't): "So long ago as that? I was young and foolish then, Mr. Smith. "But we are both older and wiser now."

BINGO: "I'm going to bring my wife around to call on you to-night." Wisherby: "That's right; but do me a favour, old man. Don't let her wear her new sealskin cloak. I don't want my wife to see it just now." Bingo (grimly): "Why, that's what we are coming for."

"STOP, sir! You needn't tell your story to me," sharply interrupted the cross-examining attorney; "address your remarks to the jury." "Are there any lawyers in the jury?" inquired the witness. "No, sir." "Gentlemen," began the witness, with marked emphasis on the word.

A DOCTOR'S ADVICE.—Doctor (to first patient): "Suffering from indigestion, eh?" "Yes, sir." "How about tobacco?" "Well, I smoke." "Ah, and you'll have to give it up." Same doctor (to second visitor): "Stomach trouble, eh?" "Yes, sir." "How about tobacco?" "I don't use it." "Well, you'd better smoke."

MRS. A.: "Here comes the man who has caused me more hours of misery and unhappiness than any other living being. I grow faint at the very sight of him." Mr. B. (scenting a confidence: "Do not agitate yourself, my love. Take my salts." (After a long look) "What eyes! Who is he?" Mrs. A. (shuddering): "My dentist."

"WHY will you associate with such men as Flimsey?" asked Brown. "For my part, I always endeavour to associate with men who are my superiors." "It can't be hard work for you to find them," replied Fogg; "but I am different from you. I am always willing that my friends should associate with their superiors."

A WEE NIP.—Lawyer: "Now, Mr. Witness, I want you to tell the truth, without any evasion. Had you or had you not had any altercation with the prisoner before this event you speak of?" Witness: "Well, to own up, we did go into the bar to take something, but I don't think that was the name of it."

"THAT'S a deuced pretty girl you have in the kitchen. Call her in and say something to her," says Mr. Wiggles, who has just returned home. "Mollie," said Mrs. Wiggles, with rapidly formed resolution, "come in here a moment. Your month is up to-morrow. As I am going to get a new cook, I will give you two weeks' wages and you can go at once."

MANY old bachelors remain old bachelors because they hear so much complaint about babies. The fact is that a baby is not one-quarter the trouble it is charged with being. Any young couple can get along with one, if they try. Papa can sit up half the night with it, and mamma can sit up the other half. What could be simpler?

"SUPPOSE," said an examiner to a student in engineering, "you had built an engine yourself, performed every part of the work without assistance, and knew that it was in complete order, but when put on the road the pump would not draw water. What would you do?" I should look into the tank and ascertain if there was any water to draw," replied the student.

SOCIETY.

THE TOILETS of sable fur are in high favour, and many imitations are in the market.

THE Lord Mayor will probably be made a Baronet on the occasion of the ensuing Royal marriage, and the two Sheriffs will be knighted.

THERE are very few women who can roll up an umbrella properly, it is an art which requires a strong hand and a certain amount of skill.

IT speaks well for Army medical officers that no fewer than fourteen of them are shown by the *Army List* to be decorated with the Victoria Cross.

THE memorial to the late Lord Frederick Cavendish, who met his death so foully in Ireland, will take the form of two splendid stained glass windows, to be placed in Cartmel Church, near Holker.

I UNDERSTAND that although nothing is yet settled, the impression in the Royal Household is that Windsor will be the scene of the Royal marriage, and that the date will be about the end of February.

CLUSTERS of great purple and pink orchids are the newest artificial blossoms worn upon evening gowns. In the hair, smaller blooms of the curiously expensive plant form aigrettes on the side, fixed by diamond pins, from which fall rows of pearls.

THE Queen has decided to visit Hyères next spring and the Hotel de l'Ermitage will be occupied by her Majesty and Princess Beatrice, and the Hotel Costebelle by the suite. The Queen will arrive at Hyères about the 24th of March, for a stay of four weeks.

FAIR hair is a disease. It is due to the absence of the pigment which imparts colour to it. The natural colour of the hair is black, or at least dark. All the savage races have black locks, and the most ancient and unmixed people of the world are of a like temperament.

IT is not a little curious that during the whole six hundred years that our Heirs-Apparent have borne the title of Prince of Wales, not one has lived to see his eldest son—or indeed any son of his—marry. Thus, for such a marriage as we are now looking forward to, there is absolutely no precedent in the history of the English Royal Family.

THE Empress Frederick and Princess Margaret of Prussia were to have come to England recently on a visit to the Queen, but it is understood that their arrival in England has now been postponed until the beginning of February. They will be the guests of the Queen at Osborne and at Windsor Castle, and of the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham, and their stay in England is expected to extend to about six weeks.

THE little ten-year-old Queen of Holland gains an experimental knowledge of domestic details at her own little farm near the royal castle at Het Loo. Here she has her poultry-yard, whose inmates she feeds herself, and her garden, where she has done all the planting and cultivating, and from which she gathers the flowers she arranges for her mother's apartment. In the house is the kitchen where the little queen learns to make tarts, and there is a drawing-room where she and her dolls hold high carnival.

THE Queen of Denmark, who is an enthusiastic musician, is said to amuse herself by playing duets on the piano with her daughters, the Princess of Wales and the Empress of Russia, when the royal family of Denmark are at their favourite resort of Fredensborg, near Copenhagen. At this castle are held all their re-unions, and the four hundred rooms of the palace are more than crowded when the fifty children and grandchildren are all assembled, attended by their suites. Her daughters are devoted to the Queen of Denmark.

STATISTICS.

Two and a half million parcels are sent monthly by parcel post.

A MILLION sovereigns laid side by side in one line would stretch nearly fourteen miles.

THE value of the fruit consumed in Great Britian every year is estimated at £10 000 000.

IN proportion to population, exactly three times as much spirits are drunk in Scotland as in England.

NINETY thousand boys and men are solely engaged in the occupation of fishing round the coasts of these islands.

THE area of Australia is about 500 000 square miles less than that of the United States, and 700,000 less than that of Europe.

GEMS.

WE never are made so ridiculous by the qualities we have as those we effect to have.

A WISE man thinks before he speaks; but a fool speaks and then thinks of what he has been saying.

PROFANITY never did any man the least good. No man it richer, happier or wiser for it. It commends no one to society; it is disgusting to refined people and abominable to the good.

ACTIONS speak more forcibly than words; they are the test of character. Like fruit upon the tree, they show the nature of the man; while motives, like the sap, are hidden from our view,

IT is not a question how much a man knows, but what use he can make of what he knows; not a question of what he has acquired, and how he has been trained, but of what he is, and what he can do.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FRIED APPLES.—Slice some apples, dip them in a batter made of one egg, sugar, milk, and flour enough to thicken. Fry a golden brown, sprinkle with lemon juice, and serve very hot.

APPLE SALAD.—Boil some good apples lightly, and then slice them into a salad bowl, adding half a pint of syrup, the rind and juice of one lemon, two dessert spoonfuls of whisky, and a tablespoonful of blanched grated almonds.

A CHEAP AND DELICIOUS RICE PUDDING.—One cup of rice well washed, two quarts of new milk, pinch of salt with sugar and flavouring to taste; grate nutmeg over it, and bake in a slow oven four or five hours. This will prove a most delicious pudding to be eaten hot or cold, and if baked slowly is better than with the use of eggs. To be eaten with lemon sauce.

WHITE PUDDINGS.—Get pudding skins from the butcher, and have them very clean. Wash in warm water, and soak in salt and water for a few hours. Toast one pound of oatmeal till it is very dry. Chop half-pound of suet. Mix those things together with half a teaspoonful of salt and quarter teaspoonful of pepper, with this fill the skins not quite full. Tie them, leaving a little room to swell. Leave a short bit, tie again, and fill another pudding. Put them in pan of boiling water, and prick them with a darning needle, and boil gently for half-an hour. One or two parboiled onions may be chopped and added if it is liked. The puddings may be made with or without the onions. A little less suet may be used, but this recipe makes them good.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE smallest parish in England is Wilcot, Oxon. It contains seven persons.

LIONS and leopards are very fond of perfumes.

SALMON, pike, and goldfish are the only fish that never sleep.

CAREFUL measurement has developed the fact that the pouch of a pelican will hold six gallons of water.

SNAILS are collected on the Kentish pastures every year in large quantities and despatched to Paris.

PEOPLE in Japan are called by the family name first, the individual or what we call Christian name next, and then the honorific—thus, "Smith Peter Mr."

THE Russian Hebrew must serve in the army, but can never be more than a private. He must pay taxes, but can never be a mayor or "elder" of his town.

THE greeting of two Arabs on the street is very prettily expressed. They clasp hands, then each man kisses his own hand which has just touched his friend's.

THERE is a "prophet" on the island of Java who has been paid £80 per year for the last thirteen years "for not predicting a tidal wave which will sweep clear over the island." The natives believe that he has only to predict to set a wave in motion.

THE chrysanthemum is stigmatised as a floral parvenu because it once had its humble habitat in kitchen gardens. It cannot be said, however, that the flower was born to blush unseen, for the homage paid to it now makes up for a century of neglect.

A NEW industry lately set on foot is the sale of water-soaked wood from old wrecks of ships. The presence of ocean salts and oxides causes this kind of work when burned in open grates to give forth beautifully mingled prismatic colours.

IT is singular that a spring confined and protected as in a watch should be seriously affected by the weather, but in the trade it is quite common to look for a run on mainsprings at certain times of the year, and after dry weather has suddenly changed into wet and cold watchmakers are often unusually busy putting in new springs.

A GERMAN commission reports that no case of damage by lightning to a ship with wire rigging has been recorded, except in a few instances where continuous connection had not been made with the hull. With iron or steel hulls the wire-rope rigging, the whole ship forms an excellent conductor to lead the electric discharge safely to the ocean. This fact explains why it is that ships at sea suffer much less frequently from lightning now than in the days of wooden vessels.

NOW that smokeless powder is an assured fact, the next move in the line of progress is to be odourless whisky. Recent experiments made by the proprietors of a local distillery have been attended with almost unlooked-for success. These experiments have culminated in the production of a liquid which is undeniably whisky, but which leaves no suspicion of an odour upon the breath. The new fluid is precisely the counterpart of the "old stuff," except in this particular. In appearance and taste no difference can be detected.

AN "IRON CROWN" was long the most sacred royal circlet in Christendom. It was made in 591 at the order of Theudelinde for her husband, Agilulf, king of the Lombards, and consisted of an iron ring inside a golden circle, the iron said to have been formed of the nails of the "True Cross." This sacred crown was kept at the Church of Monza; with it Charlemagne was crowned and all the emperors who were kings of Lombardy. Napoleon placed it on his own head at Milan in 1805.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

SAPPHO.—Declined, with thanks.

MAY.—May 17, 1858, was on a Monday.

CORA.—No; you cannot recover it in England.

PORT WINE.—Vinegar and salt remove wine stains.

G. T.—Lee is still undergoing penal servitude.

TOPSY.—First or second cousins may legally marry.

SISTER-IN-LAW.—Marriage is not legal with a deceased wife's sister.

RECIPIENT.—All receipts for £2 and upward must bear a penny stamp.

BASSO PROFUNDO.—If the man is a true bass he cannot possibly sing contralto.

JOYCE.—A domestic servant is entitled to receive, and must give, one month's notice.

PAUL PRY.—We have no knowledge of the matter of which you write.

JOEY.—The first private execution in England took place August, 1868.

S. L.—Annuities granted to members of the Royal Family are granted for life.

WRATHFUL.—It is useless to summon a child for accidentally breaking a window.

MRS. GIBBS.—If the husband leaves no effects the widow is not liable for his debts.

LITTLE HERO.—Liverpool has been a seaport since ever it was anything, because it is upon the seashore.

L. B.—There is a railway under the Mersey, from Liverpool to Birkenhead.

GRIP.—General Lord Wolseley was born at Golden Bridge House, county Dublin, June 4, 1833.

C. V. W.—Cape Government Agency 7, Albert-mansions, Victoria-street, Westminster.

CHARLIE.—The population of the world, according to the latest estimates, 1,479,7?9,400.

PRINCE.—The Tichborne trial began April 23, 1872; sentence February 28, 1874.

ANXIOUS ANNIE.—A child over fourteen years of age cannot be obliged to attend school.

SIMPLETON.—When two sentences are to "run concurrently" they both begin and end on the same dates.

I. O. U.—An I O U is evidence of debt, and can be produced as such in the county court.

DAN.—If there was no agreement, you are bound by the custom of the place with others in your occupation.

E. N.—A notice may be delivered by hand, or by word of mouth, or by post. When the notice has expired the rent may be doubled. The length of notice depends on the nature of the tenancy.

INNOCENCE.—A docatoon is a silver coin in circulation in Venice and Holland. It is worth in English currency from four to five shillings. The word is pronounced as if spelled duk-a-toon, the accent on the last syllable.

MADELINE.—Anyone may inspect a will by paying the usual fees; but the private papers, bank-books, etc., of the deceased are not open to inspection except by the executor and the legal representatives of the deceased.

ART.—"Copyright" below a published picture means that the right to reproduce it for sale or profit is reserved by the owner of the copyright. Of course you may copy any picture merely as an exercise or for amusement.

GEOF.—A return shows that during five years no fewer than 1,199 soldiers committed suicide, the next in number being publicans' assistants and hotel servants, 650; the lowest on the list are miners, of whom only 74 were guilty of self-destruction.

UNHAPPY LIZZIE.—A term of imprisonment reckons from the first day of the assize at which the prisoner was convicted. Any time he may have been awaiting trial is taken into account before sentence is passed, but does not reckon as part of the sentence recorded.

S. F.—The quickest way to San Francisco is by steamer to New York, thence per train to destination. Train takes a week to do the journey. Counting price of food, it will cost you £20 to reach San Francisco. There is no cheap way.

A FLIRT.—It is decidedly unladylike in any young woman to ape men's fashions, whether by having hair cut and "parted" like them, or wearing hats, coats, and "fronts" similar to theirs, or carrying walking-sticks, or wearing gaiters and shortening the skirts that they may be seen.

J. T.—If there is no will, and no children, the widow is entitled to £500 out of the estate, and to her share of the residue. She can take out letters of administration. A son is liable to contribute to the support of his mother, chargeable to the parish, if he is able to do so. The question of ability is for the justice to decide, on summons.

JANE.—The public baths among the ancients consisted of a great number of apartments. Both hot and cold were generally comprised in the same building. The wealthy usually had baths in their own houses, but in the time of Augustus the public baths became very numerous, and were noted for their grandeur and magnificence. It is stated that at one period there were eight hundred public baths in Rome.

MISCHIEF.—The spring season began this year on March 20th at nine o'clock in the morning, and the summer season on June 21st at six o'clock in the morning.

JOHN'S DARLING.—Sand soap is excellent for the hands of all persons engaged in manual labour. It is made by shaving down and melting some white soap, and then stirring into it, while warm, an equal quantity of fine sea sand. Put it, warm, into square molds, or roll portions of the mixture between the hands, so as to form balls. Set them in a dark place to dry gradually.

BEAUTY.—For chapped hands it is a good thing when washing them to rub them thoroughly dry with a coarse towel. On retiring at night they should be well rubbed with either olive or almond oil, after which powdered chalk should be well rubbed in. This will not only prevent chapping, but will render the hands white, and keep them so.

A LOVER OF SWEETS.—To make Everton toffy take three pounds of the best brown sugar, and boil with one and one-half pints of water, until the candy will harden in cold water. Then add one half-pound of sweet-flavoured, fresh butter, which will soften the candy. Boil a few minutes until it again hardens, and pour into trays. Flavour with lemon, if desired.

J. R.—The population of British India and India under British rule has been estimated (1891) at 278,533,000; of whom 211,936 000 are in British territory. The official return for China is 303,000,000; which is probably overstated by three millions. Russia has a population of about (in Europe) 91,861,910, in Asia, 17,000,000; and Germany of 46,855,704.

ONLY LIVE FISH SWIM UP STREAM.

In all avenues of labour,
In city, hamlet, hillside, plain,
Men are ever seeking power,
Seeking fame, or seeking gain;
But to all who seek for treasure,
Inspired by some fairy dream,
This sage maxim should remember—
Only live fish swim up stream.

He who hopes, but is inactive,
Wishing for earth's golden store
He may wish till death's stern summons
Bids the wisher wish no more,
But with unfaltering faith and courage
All may hope for joys supreme;
He who wills is sure to conquer—
Only live fish swim up stream.

If difficulties, dangers, perils,
Confront and threaten on every hand,
Remember he who braves no conflicts
Lives the life of half a man;
But to him who fears not danger,
Falters not at perils unseen,
He it is who proves the moral—
Only live fish swim up stream.

Let us then, though tempests gather,
And the way seems dark and drear,
Fight the battle still more bravely
Farther on the way's more clear.
He who hopes to be remembered
Must with courage calm, serene,
Live a noble life of action—
Only live fish swim up stream.

A YOUNG COUPLE.—There are several kinds of marriage licenses. The total cost of marriage by license before a registrar, together with cost of certificate, is £2 17s. 1d. Only one day's notice is required, but one or other of the contracting parties must have resided in the district for at least fifteen days' immediately preceding the application for the license.

HUMGRIFFIN.—The bill for the abolition of negro slavery throughout the British dominions passed the House of Commons on August 7, the House of Lords on August 20, and received the royal assent—William IV.—on August 28, 1833. The day fixed for emancipation was August 1, 1834. In 1843 Great Britain emancipated more than 12,000,000 slaves in her East Indian possessions.

WILFRID.—If you are not over 16½ years old you are fit for the navy. The marks on your cheek will not disqualify you. The fact that you are growing taller rapidly sufficiently accounts for your persistent thinness. When you have attained your maximum height your growth will then go into girth. Do not attempt to stop growth in any way, either by smoking or other plan; you may ruin your health.

LONELY.—Sydney would suit admirably as far as climate is concerned. Adelaide, South Australia, might prove even more acceptable, but it is impossible to say where you would be likely to find a situation similar to the one you now hold. If you go out you will have to trust to luck, as the saying is, and the luck in Australia at present is rather low. See that you have good letters of recommendation or introduction with you.

SLUGGARD.—If you think that you "really cannot get up much before nine o'clock in the morning," you should be sent to a military boarding-school. Your lateness would not then operate as a nuisance to the rest of your family, and military discipline would make you arise on time. A boy of seventeen who suffers himself to entertain such discreditable notions should be placed under the tutelage of some modern Gideon, who would "teach him with thorns and with briers of the wilderness" every morning before sunrise.

T. F. O.—The Post Office rule requires that the person cashing a post office order shall sign it at sight of the official who pays the cash. The rule is not always insisted on, but the official has it in his power to require the party presenting the order to sign again on the back of the document if it is brought to his counter already signed in the space left for that. Anyone signing the name of another to an order would be prosecuted for forgery or attempted fraud.

CADDY.—Tophet is a spot in a fertile valley south-east of ancient Jerusalem. It was the place where the idolatrous Jews passed their children through the fire to Moloch. At a later time it was used as a place to thrust the dead bodies of men to whom interment had been refused. It was also a receptacle for the carcases of beasts and the garbage of the streets. As a fire was kept constantly burning to consume all that was conveyed there, the word was employed metaphorically for hades.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—Of the many ways which are in common use for disinfecting rooms and houses, none so easily recommends itself to the senses and to common sense as the coffee process. Upon a shovelful of red-hot coal throw a handful of ground coffee, and walk with it through the parts of the house where the foul smells exist or which you desire to disinfect. The volatilised essential oils of the coffee will instantly correct the evils, for they have the peculiar properties of deodorising and disinfecting at the same time.

CŒUR DE LION.—At the battle Wœrth, in France, one of the bloodiest engagements of the Franco-Prussian war, the French lost 5,000 in killed and wounded, and had 5,000 taken prisoners; the Germans had 8,000 killed and wounded; at Mars-la-four, the Germans had 17,000 killed and wounded, the French loss being even greater; but at Gravelotte, where the battle continued for 12 hours, the French lost 19,000, the Germans 25,000; the carnage was described as dreadful. 2. At Waterloo the allies had 22,976 killed and wounded; the French are said to have had 40,000 killed and wounded.

PESTERED.—The insect is the common "earwig," so-called, some said, because it was supposed to bore its way into people's ear. In reality, the name is "earwing," and the prongs at its tail, which looks so formidable, are in fact only the combs with which the insect cleans its delicate wings. It lurks in cracks and crevices in wood, and under loose bark out of doors. The "cure" for it is paraffin oil. Let your friend paint her wood house with that, or drop some into cracks and crevices and paint along the wood with it close to the ground; the insects will not then ascend.

CURIOUS ONE.—Pills are not made by a "machine;" the material is kneaded up in a mortar, turned out on a small slab, flattened out like dough, then a roller is passed over the cake, which cuts it into long strips; these are individually taken and rolled into a round shape till they look like the thin stalks of black sugar sold by grocers, they are then laid upon another slab, which instead of being flattened is crossed by a series of grooves; the roller being once more passed over the strip, the grooves cut it into pieces of pill size; the hand being passed over these they are rolled into round pill shape, and filled into the store canister.

SCIENCE.—The great movements in science and commerce, which have so flooded the world with knowledge and wealth within the last two centuries, began soon after Gutenberg's invention of the art of printing, in the year 1438. An array of splendid men came on to the world's arena about that year and during the next seventy-five years, such as has not been seen since. Among them were Henry IV. of France, Luther, Columbus, William the Silent, Copernicus, Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, Lord Bacon and scores of others renowned in science, war, commerce and religion. If you will read history carefully, you will see that nature produces men as she does fruit—now and then a first-class and bounteous crop, which is followed by many seasons of ordinary fruitage.

BOLINGBROKE.—A grape shot is made of several small cast-iron balls, so fastened together that they may be loaded in a gun all at once. The firing of the gun bursts the plates apart, and the balls scatter as soon as they leave the gun. A canister shot is made up of a sheet-iron or tin can filled with small iron or lead balls, the spaces between them being usually packed with sawdust. The canister bursts as soon as it leaves the gun, and the balls are thus scattered and do great execution among large masses of men. A shrapnel shot is made up of a cast-iron shell filled with musket balls, into which melted sulphur or resin is poured so as to fill up all the spaces between. This hardens and makes the balls into a solid mass. A hole is then bored down through the sulphur and bullets of a size just large enough to hold gunpowder enough to burst the shell, by means of a fuse lighted when the gun is fired, which gun may be smooth-bored or rifled.

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